

PEDAGOGIES OF EMPOWERMENT: TOWARDS INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN
A LOCAL BLACK CHURCH

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In Partial Fulfillment
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by
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This Dissertation, written by

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ABSTRACT

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by

Karen D. Crozier

This interdisciplinary and diachronic study on the institutional Black Church and a particular, contemporary Black church explores the intersections of religion, race, and racism in the life of a sector of African American evangelical Christianity. Through the integration of educational theory and practice and narrative inquiry, a qualitative research methodology, primary attention is given to how the Black Church has educated its congregants and community towards an empowering ethic of freedom, social justice, healing, and democracy in the U.S. Another focal point includes the examination, critique, and appropriation of Paulo Freire, a Latin American pedagogue of liberation, for the institutional and local Black Church.

Research, theory, and practice were integrated or interconnected in ways that allowed for mutual, instead of unilateral, discussion throughout the body of the text. Freire was examined, critiqued, and appropriated during a ten week Bible study curriculum that was developed and implemented by the pastor of the church and researcher/member to gain access into people's experiences and stories concerning empowerment, and to reflect on how to best appropriate Freire for the Black church. The major findings included the kind of critical pedagogy that was relevant for the local Black church, the role of race and racism, and the transformation of the senior pastor concerning issues of gender and empowerment, and teaching and learning in the life of the church. Research findings unveiled insights to: a) conducting empirical research in

religious settings, b) Christian education in the church and theological academy, c) the correlation between healthy leadership and institutional empowerment, and d) change, conflict and community in the process of empowerment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have written a poem to express my deep appreciation of those who have journeyed with me throughout this process. Though everyone is not named who have contributed in both small and great ways, I, nonetheless, am grateful for who you are and what you have given me as I live into and out of my call towards justice and reconciliation in the church and society. To my ancestors, known and unknown, near and far, past and present, biological and spiritual, thank you for leaving and living a life that reveals God's presence in the world. May I continue to serve, know, and love this God who never leaves us alone.

My Tears as an Epistemological Framework

Removing of toxins
Recovery of the soul
Restoration of the mind
And the lightening of the load

My tears, my tears once hidden within my external dark hued skin
Denying my humanity
Perpetuating a fallacy
As if I can withstand years of brutality
Without ever revealing my inner reality

Terror, rape, lynching, and hate
Actions and emotions that debilitate
Sedate I remained for fear of becoming maimed

Be strong! Be strong! Don't let them see you flinch
Were the words I heard supposedly in my defense
Yet all the while I knew the truth
Both inside and out, I had no strength

However, today, reintegration is mine!
The wholeness and harmony of body, soul, and mind
Access and affirmation are possible once again
Streams of healing and love to no end
My tears, my tears once a secluded river within
Have now become my balm of Gilead

My tears, my tears have been revealed
in both public and private spaces
In classrooms, boardrooms, and other perceived awkward places
I embraced and shed the pain of past and present shame
The God of heaven and earth was speaking through my tears
Revealing the mysteries of those once silent years

My church accepted and embraced my mind
Possibly because it was a knowing of a different kind
Not one that established my superiority
But a knowing that connected our hearts, minds, and bodies
A knowing that challenged us to think of and through our God given destinies
One that displayed my vulnerability as I lived out a new reality
Through the epistemology of my tears

The Croziers are a very special family

My mother, a woman of such dignity and strength
Modeled for me courage and a spirit that never quits
Her love and care has been a sustaining presence
Enabling me to press through those difficult moments

My father, a man with only a primary education
Dreamed of a higher learning for those whom he beget
He will soon be able to boast of a daughter with three graduate degrees
I thank God for helping me to fulfill my father's dreams

My older sisters, Charlene and Patrice
Though I am the baby girl
They have always revered me with such great respect
Although both suffer from illnesses, and need support and care
I love to see the spark in their eyes whenever I am near

My brothers, Rodney, Quinn, Galen, and Bruce
One is my heart and hero
And another we struggle when we communicate
Our love for sports is my connection to the other two
They affectionately call me "Scooter" a high school nick name that they keep resurrect
I think it is their way of keeping me young and innocent, so they will not lose touch with
their sister, the one they love

My nieces and nephews have seen me graduate many times
Only to return again for a another ride
They have cheered me on wondering when it will all end
Soon, I say, because I'm about to receive the highest degree in the land

My friends and dear ones at CST
No doubt, you have become my second family
From different races, cultures, and backgrounds
We all met here and experienced the richness of God's grand diversity
A modern day Pentecost you helped me see
Young and old, female and male, clergy and laity, and seekers as well
Each speaking the glory of God in our own native theology

Now to my professors both past and present
Dr. Ernie Adolphus Smith first called me colleague without my PhD
You mentored me in a way that reflects your deep love for the Black race
You taught and lectured regardless of the space
For there were times on the freeway when I couldn't believe what was taking place
You modeled for me the way of the indigenous scholar
In both the community and university you gave with such honor

Daryl, the space you created to receive my theological location
Helped me to more thoroughly integrate my previous education
Then, to top it all of, it was you, a woman of Jewish descent
Who challenged me to name more accurately the work of my hands
What a special treasure that I did not have to compete with a voice that
Was foreign to me

Carol, you bring so many people to our conversations
They seem to be all at your command
I marvel at your ability to engage each one so authentically
Yet, in your presence there is no fear or intimidation
Because of the space you create to affirm my humanity
I treasured our intense conversations and moments of being
Those times when silence, prayer, and tears became our way of surrendering

Ellen Marshall, we were both sensitive to the move of the Spirit
as we entered into our professor-student experience
Eager to know cross-cultural healing, we named our fears
in the midst of the journey
The stakes were high, but we did not shrink back
We pushed forward in hope of a new tomorrow
In both light-hearted and intense ways, we tended the soil
Boundaries became clear, and transcending of them too
Yet the deep ties that now bind continue to carry us through

Dr. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier,
it was six years ago around this time when I first heard your voice,
we both were discerning God's right choice
It turned out to be entrance into CST
The place I would prepare to embrace my destiny
Soon after we became intense prayer partners
Consistently seeking God's anointing power
What the Lord revealed during those times became the solid rock
The foundation for those times when we had to be apart
From a distance yet up close you mentored and prayed
Knowing you could not interfere with God's great plan
In God's hand you knew where I was
So you positioned yourself as you took orders from above
Your humility and ability to know a metaphysical reality
Helped to usher me into my scholarly spirituality

My tears, my tears will never be denied again
Lamentations and deep moans will continue to descend
For now I know, they are not to be feared, but rather a window to the soul that is within

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INTRODUCTION

Research on the Black Church as a religious, empowering institution for many African American Christians has been conducted for over a century. Early in the twentieth century, sociologist, historian, and activist W. E. B. Du Bois provided in-depth, systematic insight to the impact of the then coined Negro Church on the moral life and behavior of African Americans.¹ Employing both quantitative and qualitative (personal interviews, primary archival church documents, reports) research methods to unearth African American religious experience, Du Bois was ahead of his time in the way he accessed and told the Black Church's story.² Then, in 1921, historian Carter G. Woodson details the struggle and response of Black churches and ministers during the ante-bellum and postbellum epochs.³ According to Woodson, his scholarly contribution was used in theological seminaries to provide a history of the Black Church for both Black and White institutions.⁴ Hence, Woodson's work is possibly the earliest text used in church history courses that addresses the experience of African American Christians.⁵

These early twentieth century examinations of the Black Church by Du Bois and Woodson are interdisciplinary in nature. Today, their works would be classified as sociology of religion and history of religion, respectively. In the latter half of the century, E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Church in America* and C. Eric Lincoln's *The Black Church Since Frazier*, his co-authored volume with Mamiya *The Black Church in*

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *The Negro Church*, introd. Phil Zuckerman, Sandra L. Barnes, and Daniel Cady, (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University, 1903; reprint, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003).

² Phil Zuckerman, Sandra L. Barnes, and Daniel Cady, introduction to *The Negro Church*, edited by W. E. B. Du Bois (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University, 1903; reprint, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003), x.

³ Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1972).

⁴ Woodson, preface to the second edition.

⁵ Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity of reading Woodson's volume in my church history course because it was not part of the curriculum.

the African American Experience, and Alfred J. Raboteau's *Slave Religion* are scholarly works that continue the sociological and historical research on the Black Church as first conducted by Du Bois and Woodson.⁶ Like their predecessors, Frazier, Lincoln, and Raboteau look at the intersections of religion, race, racism, and culture which detail the ethic towards freedom and justice displayed by the Black Church from its earliest days as an invisible institution to its emergence as a visible rock in the Black community.

Within the last ten years, there has been a proliferation of research on the Black Church which includes both affirmations and a clarion call for renewal or reform in light of the not yet acquired reality of freedom both inside and outside of the Black Church.⁷ Marcia Riggs and Demetrius K. Williams illuminate the continued oppression and degradation of women, and other sexuality issues in Black churches.⁸ As a Christian ethicist, Riggs challenges African American clergy and laity alike to rethink their ethical response in ways that will free and empower both female and male to live in right relationship with one another in private and public spaces. Williams draws from the biblical tradition of the liberating message and ministry of Jesus to challenge African American churches and male clergy's misappropriation of the Bible for their personal

⁶ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*; [published with] C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁷ Brian K. Blount, *Go Preach!: Mark's Kingdom Message and the Black Church Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998); Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); James H. Harris, *The Courage to Lead: Leadership in the African American Urban Church* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002); Beverly J. Moss, *A Community Text Arises: A Literate Text and a Literacy Tradition in African-American Churches* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2003); Iva E. Carruthers, Frederick D. Haynes, III, and Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., eds., *Blow the Trumpet in Zion: Global Vision and Action for the 21st-Century Black Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

⁸ Marcia Y. Riggs, *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003); Demetrius K. Williams, *An End to This Strife: The Politics of Gender in African American Churches* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

gain, and to broaden their perspective to include gender and sexuality issues in their struggle racism and classism.

This study, like the classical and much of the contemporary research that has been conducted on the Black Church, is interdisciplinary and diachronic in nature. However, the integration of educational theory and practice in both the institutional Black Church and a particular, contemporary local Black church is used to explore the intersections of religion, race, and racism in the life of African American Christians. Covering the inception of the first Black church in the late 1700s to the present lived experience of a 21st century local Black church, primary attention is given to how the Black Church has educated its congregants and community towards an empowering ethic of freedom, social justice, healing, and democracy in a country that still suffers from the legacy of slavery and the belief in White supremacy.

Another focal point includes the examination, critique, and appropriation of Paulo Freire, a Latin American pedagogue of liberation, for the institutional and local Black Church. This additional emphasis should not be perceived as separate from the first main interest, but rather as an integral part. The liberation pedagogy of Paulo Freire is by far more systematic and developed than anything that has been developed in the Black Church to date and is thus used as a starting point on religious education in the Black Church. It is Freire's life and work that begins this study in Chapter 1, which is followed by a critique of Freire in Chapters 2 through 4, and finally, my appropriation of him for my context, is also included in Chapter 4.

Unlike the previously noted research on the Black Church, this study is unique in at least two ways. First, as previously mentioned, this study integrates educational theory

and practice instead of other social scientific methods and tools.⁹ Second, research, theory, and practice are integrated or interconnected in ways that allow for mutual, instead of unilateral, discussion throughout the body of the text. As will be seen below, although theory and research on the Black Church and African American experience were used to design this study, neither theory or prior research were merely accepted as the norm or most accurate explanatory tool for today. Rather, a dialogue occurs between theories, research, and the practice of empowering African American Christians through religious education in order to understand theory in context, and the degree of its relevance for the researcher and/or practitioner.

This integration of research, theory, and practice is extremely significant because it broadens the scope of both traditional theological studies and empirical or social scientific studies. In general, studies conducted in theology explore the history of ideas and the discourse in ways that are more abstract and often times removed from the experience of both the scholar and lay person. Furthermore, the intellectual illumination, correction, and/or insight that occur usually remain in the private sphere of the academic guild. Hence, the new dimension of the theoretical paradigm remains aloof from experience and only challenged based on its consistency in logic in arguing one's thesis. Then, on the other hand, although empirical studies are more concrete and inherently focus on observable behavior, they do not provide the reader with the theory or rationale behind the behavior. These kind of studies look at the implications of the findings, and

⁹ Although Christian education research in the Black Church has been conducted, the following studies work towards the development of a teaching model for the Black Church instead of critiquing and appropriating an established pedagogy. See Yolanda Smith, *Preserving Faith and Culture in the African American Church: A Tri-Collaborative Model for Teaching the Triple-Heritage through Spirituals*, Ph.D. diss., Claremont School of Theology, 1998 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1999); Linda Hickmon Evans, *Recovery of Indigenous Models of Religious Education in the Black Church*, Ph.D. diss., Claremont School of Theology, 2001 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2002); Anne E. Streaty Wimberly and Evelyn L. Parker, eds. *In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002).

how their research study either advances or questions prior research done on the particular topic, issue, or question. With the integration of ideas, discourse, and behavior, this study demonstrates the relevance of certain theological, educational, sociological, and psychological theories for purposes of educational empowerment in the Black Church or the need to refine one's practice and/or research method so that it/they can be in closer alignment to one's theoretical framework. In either case, this integrated study yields more information than traditional theological and social scientific studies and most importantly, provides access of its findings to a greater audience that includes yet transcends academicians of theology and religion.

For this particular theological study, narrative inquiry, a qualitative, empirical research method, and a critical pedagogy, an empowering educational theory and practice, are used to explore the meaning and experience of empowerment in the life of the historical and a local Black Church. The following questions are the inquiries that I brought to the study:

1. Will traditional, evangelical theological notions of the self emerge as a hindrance in the design and implementation of a pedagogy of empowerment?
2. What kind of pedagogy of empowerment is relevant for a local Black evangelical church in a racially and socio-economically diverse community with many low socio-economic members?
3. What does a local Black evangelical church empower its members and community for?
4. Are institutional changes necessary for a local Black evangelical church to empower its members and community? If so, what are they?

The first research question allows me to examine the influence of the doctrine of Original Sin in Protestant theology on African American evangelicals in experiencing a pedagogy of empowerment. As is discussed thoroughly in Chapter 1, a pedagogy of empowerment challenges students and teachers to critically examine one's oppressed reality through reflection, and then to form a response or action based on this different view of the world with the intent of creating a more just, humane existence. In Chapter 2, it is noted how early African American Christians questioned the very premise of Christianity because of the slave master's claim of spiritual salvation that was void of a social freedom or salvation. Although they did not question the theological contention of being a sinner, the converted Africans in the U.S. were perplexed over being "saved" yet remaining in bondage. Will this same paradox be present among contemporary African American Christians even though physical chains have been removed? Or, is the removal of the physical chains without necessarily obtaining a greater sense of freedom cause for contemporary African American Christians to accept their present plight as divine providence because they have made it into their own "promised land"? Will some other response emerge that help them to reflect on the doctrinal claim of being spiritually wretched and depraved while belonging to a people who have and are experiencing social degradation and dehumanization?

The second research question allows me to examine, critique, and appropriate Freire's pedagogy while I am practicing in a local Black church context. Throughout this study, Chapters 1 through 5, there is an ongoing conversation with Freire. As stated earlier, he is thoroughly discussed in the first Chapter to lay the pedagogical groundwork.

This is done to present my understanding of him, and then to provide both an intellectual and practical critique of his pedagogy while I am in the field.

The third research question allows me to examine continuity and/or discontinuity between the historical Black Church and a contemporary Black church. Hence, Chapter 2 focuses on how the Black Church and certain leaders empowered its people through education with a focus on the particular outcomes or objectives of their educational endeavors. Many of the African American Christians believed the democratic principles within the U.S. Constitution could be condoned because of their theological understanding of the “Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.”¹⁰ In addition, Chapter 3 highlights the diverse response of African Americans to the race problem as eloquently described by Du Bois in the *Souls of Black Folk*.¹¹ Alongside the religious paradox, African Americans experience a social paradox in which their African and American souls are at war because of the unfavorable gaze of the White dominant culture. In light of these paradoxes and emphasis on education in times past, will they still be evident in the contemporary local Black church? If not, what retentions will be evident and what changes will have occurred in response to the race problem? These questions are addressed more clearly in Chapters 4 and 5.

Finally, the fourth research question allows me to explore issues of institutional change, assessment, and effectiveness for a Black religious institution.¹² In the Black

¹⁰ These are not my choice of words, but as is demonstrated in Chapter 2, they are those of the early African American Church fathers.

¹¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989; first published, 1903).

¹² Institutional change, assessment, and effectiveness are terms or jargon that are used to communicate the forms of measurement and the degree of success that takes place in institutions of higher education. In essence, these institutions, for external and/or internal purposes, conduct research to provide evidence on the value of their educational process and product with the hope of being able to change in light of the findings from conducting institutional research. Here, in another way, I employ educational

Church's attempt to empower through education, there is a need to reflect on and evaluate both the process and outcomes. The doing without reflecting is a shortcoming in the Black Church, and excluding Chapter 3, I provide a corrective that can help the Black Church and local Black churches integrate action and reflection. It challenges the Black Church to look within as well as without for structures and forms of oppression.

These four research questions were generated as a result of the dearth of literature in religious education on Freire, and on appropriating Freire for the Black Church. There is a hand full of religious educators who have been influenced by Freire who are discussed in more detail in Chapter 1, but for the most part, religious educators who have engaged Freire have done so from one of two places. On one hand, some of those who find Freire provocative have critiqued and appropriated him ideologically without thinking about the significance of his pedagogy while actually practicing in a particular context.¹³ Then, on the other hand, there has been an uncritical appropriation of Freire for Christian education contexts.¹⁴ In neither case, and even for some of those religious educators who are discussed in Chapter 1, there is not a thorough examination of Freire's pedagogy to understand how a Latin American, Marxist oriented pedagogue could speak

research and practice in a religious setting. Although I do not give extensive attention to this body of literature in the study, my working understanding of it is evident as I explore and examine the Black Church.

¹³ See Robert Pazmino, *Latin American Journey: Insights for Christian Education in North America* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1994); T. M. Moore, "Conscientization and Christian Education: The Process Pedagogy of Paulo Freire," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 4 (December 1988): 453-64; Robert K. Martin, "Paulo Freire's Liberationist Pedagogy and Christian Education: A Critical Investigation of Compatibility," *Koinonia* 4 (Fall 1992): 162-91; Daniel Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988).

¹⁴ See Olivia Pearl Stokes, "Black Theology: A Challenge to Religious Education," in *Religious Education and Theology*, ed. Norma H. Thompson (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1982), 71-99, and "Education in the Black Church: Design for Change," *Religious Education* 69 (July – August, 1974): 433-45; Grant S. Shockley, "Black Theology and Black Religious Education," in *Theologies of Religious Education*, ed. Randolph Crump Miller (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1995), 314-35; Kelly Brown Douglas, "Teaching Womanist Theology," in *Living the Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology*, ed. Cheryl J. Sanders (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 147-55.

to and in a North American religious context. Therefore, in this study, I examine, critique and appropriate Freire while teaching as a religious educator and conducting research in a local Black church.

I have provided an integrated presentation of my Chapters thus far because this more accurately reflects the nature of this study. Nevertheless, now, I provide a linear description of what is to follow. In Chapter 1, an extensive look at Paulo Freire's life and pedagogy is presented. The critique of Freire is in Chapters 2 through 4, and Chapter 4 is where I also describe ways in which I found Freire helpful for my context.

The Black Church is the focus of Chapter 2. Here, I discuss how the Black Church engaged slavery, White supremacy, and *de jure* and *de facto* racial segregation through its leadership, theology, and social teaching.

Chapter 3 introduces Du Bois' theory of double consciousness in Black life to underscore the experience of paradox in African American religiosity. Furthermore, a critique of James Fowler's heuristic of faith development is also included in this Chapter to demonstrate the limitations of Fowler's model for African Americans. Then, Chapter 4 is a thorough description of the research methodology and my pedagogy. In addition, a description is given of the local Black church, the procedure, and findings of this study. The particular research methodology and pedagogy that were chosen for this study do not separate theory and practice. Moreover, they both affirm the researcher and pedagogue as subject, and not as a neutral or objective observer. Therefore, in Chapters 3 through 5, I speak in-depth about how I am constructing meaning of the texts and context. This was done to demonstrate my social location within Freire and the Black Church tradition, and the self I brought to study of the Black Church.

With narrative inquiry, a social scientific research methodology, I was able to do empirical, scientific research on empowerment and the religious experience of African Americans. As is explained in more detail in Chapter 4, narrative inquiry is a method that is used to understand experience and story as lived and told by participants in context or the natural setting in which they live, move, and have their being.¹⁵ This empirical and critical integration of the social sciences and religion/theology is not new in regards to studies on the Black Church (as demonstrated above) or other issues concerning faith and spirituality.¹⁶ However, to my knowledge, no one has integrated narrative inquiry and religion/theology. Hence, this study can open up another avenue to the integration of social science and religion/theology in general, and how empirical research can be conducted in religious institutions.

Chapter 5 is the final chapter which is a discussion of my findings and the significance of the study for Christian education, Black and Womanist liberation theology, and Black Church studies. Because this study is exploratory in nature, I do not seek to make universal claims for the institutional Black Church or for the Christian tradition. In addition, although some implications of the study are discussed, these

¹⁵ D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

¹⁶ See James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); Elizabeth J. Tisdell, "Spirituality and Emancipatory Adult Education in Women Adult Educators for Social Change," in *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis*, ed. Sharan B. Merriam and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 62-88; Richard F. Wolff, "A Phenomenological Study of In-Church and Televised Worship," in *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis*, ed. Sharan B. Merriam and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 96-116; Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979); Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Hispanic Bible Institutes: A Community of Theological Construction* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2004). Scholars who have not conducted empirical research, but have done critical correlations between a social science discipline and theology are Carol Lakey Hess, *Caretakers of Our Common House: Women's Development in Communities of Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997); Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method*, new ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

connections are made to certain general issues that may exist in many churches regardless of the race, class, or theological orientation.

This study marks the culmination of my deep dream and yearning in graduate school. After the completion of my first graduate degree in 1996, I entered a second grade classroom in the community of my childhood with what I considered to be sound theory to address the educational needs of African American children in particular, and ethnic minority children in general. However, to my dismay, I struggled to experience the relevance of Afrocentric pedagogy, multicultural theory, and Black cultural learning styles in my practice as teacher. These scholarly critiques of Eurocentric and ethnocentric pedagogies were intellectually intriguing, but apparently bankrupt in their ability to bring about educational reform and change in my classroom. Once I began to realize that there were other institutional issues and ways of knowing that thwarted the implementation of such an alternative, critical pedagogy, I yearned for a different educational experience when I returned to graduate school for my doctorate. I yearned for the integration of research, theory, and practice so that epistemological connections and analysis would be an ongoing process grounded in practice and the field. I yearned for change and community that would reflect my understanding of God as redeemer, reconciler, and healer in the world. I yearned for a more just world and how I could contribute academically and spiritually to this process. The desire was fulfilled, and I am encouraged and empowered to continue living in and with the world that embody my path of justice.

CHAPTER 1

PAULO FREIRE: A PEDAGOGUE OF EMPOWERMENT

Paulo Freire is an influential figure in the field of education and beyond.

Sociology, political theory, developmental psychology, theology, philosophy, cultural studies, and anthropology are only some of the fields that he has impacted and engaged as he worked on and worked out his pedagogy of liberation.¹ In doing justice to an educator, activist, scholar whose thought and practice spans well over three decades, I first provide a historical, biographical overview of his life's work. This biographical sketch is an overview of some social, political, and educational experiences that shaped his pedagogy in addition to some more private moments in the life of Freire. In the second major section, I discuss Freirean pedagogy by first presenting his general understanding of education. Next, I describe and discuss his "method" which includes Freire's resistance to the term "method." Finally, a cursory examination of some of his academic sources within his larger pedagogical framework is presented. These three sub-sections were chosen in an attempt to foreground Freire's politicized pedagogy in ways that would allow for more than just isolated, ideological exchange. In the third and final major section, I discuss religious educators who have been influenced by Freire and how they have appropriated him into their particular context.

Biographical Sketch

Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was born on September 19, 1921, in northeast Brazil, in Recife, the district of Casa Amarela to the parents of Edeltrudes Neves Freire and

¹ Peter Mayo, *Liberating Praxis: Paulo Freire's Legacy for Radical Education and Politics* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 1.

Joaquim Freire.² Freire's mother had completed high school and spoke fluent French, and his father was an officer in the military.³ In 1931, the family moved from Recife to Jaboatao due to the world economic crisis of 1929.⁴ During this time, Freire notes, "I had the possibility to experience hunger. And I say I had the *possibility* because I think the experience was very useful to me."⁵ Although Freire was born in Northeast Brazil, one of the poorest regions in the country which include short life expectancy rates, high levels of unemployment and underemployment, malnutrition, and low literacy rates, Freire did not necessarily know poverty until his family and the world experienced an economic crisis.⁶ When Freire's father died three years later, his educational progress was delayed due to his father's death and the persistent presence of poverty at the age of thirteen.⁷

Freire returned to school when he was sixteen, but he entered high school where all of his classmates were either eleven or twelve.⁸ Freire's competence of and function in two class systems emerged during this time. While at school, he felt inferior to many of his classmates because of his age and much lower socio-economic status. Freire's tall, lanky, and undernourished body in pants that were shorter than the length of his legs did not compare to the adequately nourishment, shelter, and dress of his classmates.⁹ Because of this, he considered himself to be an ugly teenager and fearful of asking questions in a class where he felt he should have been the most intelligent instead of the

² Moacir Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire: His Life and Work*, trans. John Milton (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 1.

³ Ibid; Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), xix.

⁴ Gadotti, 3.

⁵ Horton and Freire, xix (italics are Freire's).

⁶ Ibid., xvii-xviii.

⁷ Gadotti, 3.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

least.¹⁰ However, after school, Freire's cultural environment was different from the one he experienced at school. Living among poor rural families and playing with the children of the workers enabled Freire to encounter and engage difference as he moved in and between two cultures, two worlds. He recounts, "My experience with them helped me to get used to a different way of thinking and expressing myself. This was the grammar of the people, the language of the people, and as an educator of the people I devote myself today to the rigorous understanding of this language."¹¹

Freire was raised in the Catholic religion. Gadotti argues that Freire's religion strongly influenced his pedagogical theories and practice.¹² As a co-laborer with Freire for nearly twenty years and recognized as a distinguished authority on Freire's work, Gadotti asserts, "Freire never denied his Christian upbringing; in fact, he has always considered Christianity progressive. But he would criticize what he called the church of the oppressors, opposing it to the prophetic church, the church of the oppressed."¹³ As a student at the university, Freire was a part of the Catholic Action Movement which is "an organization set up by the Catholic Church in the 1920s to publicize Catholicism. It was formed by grassroots teams, diocesan, regional, and national federations and national councils. In the 1950s this group had an important role in the formation and organization of in the struggle for grassroots reforms."¹⁴ The Catholic Action Movement focused more on social issues and looked to transform social injustices such as poverty and hunger.¹⁵ Hence, Freire's Christian convictions were expressed in his social concern for

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Gadotti, 4.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 162.

¹⁵ Horton and Freire, xx.

the poor and marginalized. Moreover, as stated above, his relationship with the poor challenged his thinking as well which included his Christian thought or theology which was never fully developed. In the latter Freire, Gadotti notes that Freire's balance between Christian and Marxist themes is broken because Freire gives more attention to social themes and less on the role of the church.¹⁶ Nevertheless, other scholars contend that Freire's pedagogy can be examined from a theological-biblical perspective to understand how his religion influenced his work with the oppressed.¹⁷

From 1936 to 1944, between the ages of fifteen and twenty-three, two monumental events occurred in his life. First, he discovered teaching as a passion as he was able to move from hungry, inept yet interested student to eager, astute student once his older brother began to contribute to the economic welfare of the family.¹⁸ His passion for learning followed Freire as he began to teach Portuguese grammar at the same school he had completed his secondary education, Colegio Oswaldo Cruz.¹⁹ In both studying and teaching, Freire discovered his love for engaging students in the teaching-and-learning process.²⁰ Second, he married Elza Maria Costa de Oliveira, who was a primary school teacher, in 1944.²¹ They became the parents of five children.

Prior to Freire's work with the Social Service of Industry as the educational director and after teaching Portuguese grammar, he had a brief, brief stint as a lawyer (he had only served one client).²² In 1946, his new governmental position in the state of

¹⁶ Gadotti, 96-97.

¹⁷ Balduino A. Andreola, "Letter to Paulo Freire," in Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Indignation* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2004), xxxix.

¹⁸ Gadotti, 5.

¹⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Continuum, 1994), 13.

²⁰ Gadotti, 5.

²¹ Gadotti, 4.

²² Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 14-16.

Pernambuco occupied the next eight years of his life.²³ As the educational director, he had several responsibilities which included coordinating the work of the teachers with the children, working with the families, and studying the relationships between pupils, teachers, and parents.²⁴ In his work, he discovered a linguistic discontinuity between the language used at school (middle-class language) and the language (working-class) used at home. Consequently, for Freire, a starting point in order to develop a relevant literacy pedagogy became the language of the people, the working-class.²⁵ Once leaving this governmental position in 1954, Freire entered the academy to teach history and the philosophy of education at the University of Recife.²⁶ Then, in 1958, Freire was able to demonstrate his studies of his pedagogy in teaching adult literacy while at the Cultural Extension Service of the University of Recife when he made a presentation at a regional seminar on “Adult Education and Marginal Populations: The Problem of the Mocambos slums in the Northeast of Brazil.”²⁷ Freire was a founder and the first director of the Cultural Extension Service.²⁸ In 1959, one year later, Freire received his Ph.D. from the University of Recife and wrote his thesis on “Present-day Education in Brazil.”²⁹

Building on and applying the ideological claims he made in his doctoral thesis, Freire experimented further with his method in Angicos, the state of Rio Grande do Norte, in 1962.³⁰ With his emerging pedagogy, he taught three-hundred rural farm workers how to read and write in forty-five days.³¹ Due to his accelerated and

²³ Gadotti, 4.

²⁴ Ibid., 5 -7.

²⁵ Ibid., 7.

²⁶ Horton and Freire, xxii.

²⁷ Gadotti, 8.

²⁸ Horton and Freire, xxii; Gadotti, 8.

²⁹ Gadotti, 8.

³⁰ Ibid., 15.

³¹ Ibid.

widespread success, Freire was invited by President Joao Goulart and Minister of Education Paulo de Tarso Santos to design and implement a literacy campaign for the nation in 1963.³² Within one year, Freire had coordinated 20,000 cultural circles to meet the needs of over two million illiterate people in Brazil. However, Freire's national literacy campaign was terminated by the military coup in 1964, and hence, he was not able to bring his vision to fruition.³³

In June of 1964, Freire was imprisoned by the military coup and was perceived as an "international subversive," and a "traitor to Christ and the Brazilian people."³⁴ Weary of being followed, questioned, and stifled, Freire opted for exile in an attempt to live and sustain the process of democratization and liberation for the masses.³⁵ Bolivia was the only place that would accept him, but due to his difficulty with the altitude and another military coup, Freire soon went to Chile where agrarian reform was taking place. From 1964 to 1969, Freire worked in the Social Development Division and the Research and Training Institute for Agrarian Reform.³⁶ In Chile working on agrarian reform, Freire was able to study and enhance his pedagogy in a new context and historical circumstances. When his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was written in 1968, it was considered to be a "very violent" book against Christian Democracy.³⁷ Even though the book was not published until 1970, Freire left Chile in 1969 in part due to the harsh accusation he received from right-wing educators concerning his work, thought, and life as expressed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.³⁸

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 34 - 35.

³⁵ Ibid., 35.

³⁶ Ibid., 36 - 37.

³⁷ Ibid., 38.

³⁸ Ibid.

After Chile, Freire accepted two invitations. One was to become a visiting professor at Harvard University at the Center of Educational and Developmental Studies for six months. In addition, he also agreed to work with the World Council of Churches, an organization that supported liberation movements in African countries such as Angola and Mozambique, so he would not lose contact with the concrete by just working with books in North America.³⁹ He spent six months at Harvard, and from 1970 to 1980 he served as an educational consultant to Third World countries for the World Council of Churches. In his work with countries such as Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tome, and Principe, Freire worked to integrate his pedagogy of empowerment with the liberation cause of the oppressed.⁴⁰

Freire's return home from exile occurred in 1980.⁴¹ Prior to his arrival, he had joined a socialist democratic party called the Worker's Party that was being formed in Sao Paulo, Brazil.⁴² From 1980 to 1986, he founded and directed the Wilson Pinheiro Foundation which was linked to the Worker's Party where Freire continued his work in adult literacy.⁴³ On October 24, 1986, Elza, his wife of forty-two years, died.⁴⁴

After recovering from the loss of his wife Elza, Freire remarried one of his former students, Ana Maria Araujo Hasche, in 1988.⁴⁵ A year earlier, he had received his teaching position back at Federal University of Pernambuco.⁴⁶ Then, in 1989, the Worker's Party won the 1989 municipal elections in Sao Paulo when Freire became

³⁹ Gadotti, 38 – 41.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 47.

⁴¹ Ibid., 48.

⁴² Ibid., xi.

⁴³ Ibid., 76 – 77.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 162.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 76.

appointed Secretary of Education of the Municipality of Sao Paulo.⁴⁷ From 1989 to 1991, Freire worked feverishly to change the face of Brazilian schools that had become deplorable, debasing, and dysfunctional.⁴⁸ In 1991, he resigned from this governmental position to focus on his lecturing, consulting and writing.⁴⁹ On May 2, 1997, Freire's "grand trans-historical journey" began.⁵⁰ However, in his departure from time and space, he is being re-invented, re-cognized, and re-envisioned by those who continue to inform and be informed by the pedagogue of empowerment.

Freirean Pedagogy

Freire's literacy and postliteracy educational agenda includes yet transcends course content (what is taught) and best teaching practices (how to teach). In his pedagogy, Third and First World educators as well as primary, secondary, and post-secondary educators in public or religious contexts can discover the rich depth, breadth, height, and width of the educational process and its potential in contributing to peace and justice in the world.

Freire on Education

For Freire, a main, underlying tenet is that education does not occur in a vacuum because the process of teaching-and-learning is always grounded in a particular social, political context.⁵¹ Within any educational space, there are forces, conditions, and structures that contribute to the denial of literacy to the masses, and thereby the exclusion of the people or non-literate from the participation in the creation of history. In a

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the City*, trans. Donaldo Macedo (New York: Continuum, 1993), 28 - 29.

⁴⁹ Gadotti, 76.

⁵⁰ Andreola, xxxiv.

⁵¹ Paulo Freire and Antonio Faundez, *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation*, trans. Tony Coates (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989), 30-34.

nutshell, education is not neutral, but political. Furthermore, the dominant group or ideology that claims the neutrality of education does not tend to focus on cause and effect in education and in the world, but merely on the transferring of knowledge that is usually alien to the experience of the oppressed. This apparent decontextual or acontextual educational framework is not neutral, according to Freire, but rather another complex layer in the subtlety of the social conflicts and problems that occur within the educational space.⁵²

The forces, conditions, and structures that tend to be overlooked or dismissed by far too many pedagogues are the main foci in Freire's pedagogy. In describing the political and contextual nature of his pedagogy, Freire unabashedly asserts, "This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for liberation."⁵³ In no uncertain terms, the context of education of the oppressed, the non-elite, is deconstructed in order to obliterate the obfuscation of their existential reality. Without the emphasis on apprehending one's oppressed condition in education, the teaching-and-learning process continues to function as a domesticating tool that can potentially lead to literacy, but not necessarily to political and economic enfranchisement; the once illiterate remain ignorant to some of the real, underlying causes of their disinherited, dispossessed state.⁵⁴

⁵² Paulo Freire, "Interview with Paulo Freire," in *Education, Power, and Personal Biography: Dialogues with Critical Educators*, ed. Carlos Alberto Torres (New York: Routledge, 1998), 98-99.

⁵³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, 30th Anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 48.

⁵⁴ Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1985), 101-04.

In his explicit manner of naming the political nature of education and incorporating the causes and effects of oppression as the core curriculum in his literacy and postliteracy pedagogy, Freire also shares in the kind of context an emancipatory and empowering education can occur. Initially, he contends that his pedagogical process can only occur in a post-revolutionary societal setting because an oppressive government would not allow for the masses to begin to question and to think about their plight, and to act towards their emancipation.⁵⁵

Freire's understanding of a post-revolutionary society has to do with the move from a backward, illiterate, anti-dialogical, and elitist society towards one that is open and democratic.⁵⁶ This post-revolutionary society is one where the government gains independence from its European or Euro-American oppressor and assumes responsibility in the already/not yet transitional phase of ushering in a new cultural climate that provides economic, political, and social access to the oppressed. However, in his later thought and practice, Freire's position evolves into one that allows for the implementation of his pedagogy in both post and quasi-revolutionary contexts just as long as the Freirean democratic principles remain as the foundation in the struggle against oppression and injustice.⁵⁷

Mayo, a Freirean pedagogue, argues that Freire's "philosophy applies to work within a revolutionary setting and to work within a social movement seeking transformation in an industrialized society."⁵⁸ In broadening the context of the practice of his pedagogy, Freire acknowledges the possibilities and limitations of governments in

⁵⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 86.

⁵⁶ Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 1973), 8-9.

⁵⁷ Paulo Freire, "A Response," in *Mentoring the Mentor: A Critical Dialogue with Paulo Freire*, ed. Paulo Freire et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 303-06, 307-10, 325-28.

⁵⁸ Mayo, *Liberating Praxis*, 71.

leading the way towards social transformation. Moreover, in either case, what is significant to note is that a top-down transformation is not Freirean although in his earlier work he is criticized for being elitist.

The particular social and political circumstances that faced Freire during the early implementation of his pedagogy of empowerment in the 1960s included Brazil's transition from colonialism to its independence marked by the struggle to be and become a country that possessed the true character of democracy.⁵⁹ Hence, Freire sought to develop and implement "a literacy program which would be an introduction to the democratization of culture, a program with men as its Subjects rather than as patient recipients, a program which itself would be an act of creation, capable of releasing other creative acts, one in which students would develop the impatience and vivacity which characterizes search and invention."⁶⁰ Within this pedagogical vision for Brazil is Freire's analysis and critique of the existing educational experience and the social, political, and economic issues that must be addressed in order to become a democratic country. In order for the very poor to become participants in the transition from colonialism to independence, the new epoch, they must become educated not only to "read the word" but also to "read the world."

The Freirean "Method"

How does Freire educate for social transformation and democratization in a country that is riddled with nearly four-million school-children who lacked schooling, and sixteen million illiterates who were fourteen years or older in 1964?⁶¹ Furthermore, how does Freire address the deep, complex human, psychological, and social needs of the

⁵⁹ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 7-8.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 43 (the capitalization is Freire's).

⁶¹ Ibid., 41.

millions upon millions of the oppressed who had internalized the oppressor in their capitulation to their existential condition?⁶² How does Freire challenge the oppressed to rethink their “objectification” in order to experience their humanization or participation in culture, in history as subjects, as creators, as authentic, free beings?⁶³ What kind of educational agenda and experience can engender the power to transform the condition of both the oppressed and the oppressor instead of merely reversing the roles?⁶⁴

Freire’s “method” answers all of the above questions that may be unsatisfactory to some, but nevertheless, he takes on serious and rather difficult issues in education like no other pedagogue. These issues fall outside of the purview of traditional education, and even when they are attempted to be addressed, there exists no sound, ongoing reflection and practice on how to really achieve such lofty yet necessary educational goals. On a road few have traveled, Freire does not simply espouse an educational philosophy on how things should be, but works it out while in the trenches with the people. For example, Freire created institutions of “cultural circles” that involved the masses in being co-participants and investigators in their learning because the connotation of school was passive that did not provide the appropriate construct for the progressive, assertive method he sought to embody.⁶⁵ Moreover, Freire notes, “Instead of a teacher, we had a coordinator; instead of lectures, dialogue; instead of pupils, group participants; instead of alienating syllabi, compact programs that were ““broken down”” and ““codified”” into learning units.”⁶⁶

⁶² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 48.

⁶³ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 42.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

In this brief description of the “cultural circles,” two basic, essential components of his method are illuminated. First, the negative connotation of teacher that is associated with expertise and the transference of knowledge. In the Freirean method, the teacher cannot be one who is the sole active participant in the learning process in the dispensing of knowledge on passive students, but rather one who is coordinating educational experiences and creating knowledge together with the students.⁶⁷ Freire asserts, “Adult literacy, seen from a liberating point of view, is an act of knowledge and creativity by which learners function along with educators as knowing subjects. Obviously learners are not seen as “empty vessels” mere recipients of an educator’s word.”⁶⁸

By naming the students as knowing subjects, the Freirean method repositions the role of both the educator and educand in at least two fundamental ways. On one hand, the educator is challenged to view the educands as people who have previous knowledge that needs to be accounted for in the curriculum. According to Freire, “This task implies that revolutionary leaders do not go to the people in order to bring them a message of “salvation,” but in order to come to know through dialogue with them both their *objective situation* and *awareness* of that situation – the various levels of perception of themselves and of the world in which and with which they exist.”⁶⁹ What the educands already know is important, and what they know should not be dismissed. This affirmation of what the educands know even in their unlettered, illiterate state, allows space for the continuity of experience between adult literacy education and the lived experience of the educands. For example, in his position with the Social Service of Industry in Brazil, Freire discovered that a study of the language of the people was a

⁶⁷ Freire, *Politics of Education*, 101-02.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 102.

⁶⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 95 (italics are Freire’s).

more appropriate starting in his pedagogy than the various philosophical, psychological, and linguistic academic tools that he possessed.⁷⁰ Hence, teaching adult literacy within a Freirean framework must begin with what the educand knows, and in this vein, the educator becomes an educand of the language of the people. Furthermore, the educand becomes the educator in the ways that the people are able to speak and name their world which is foreign to that of the educator because she/he is not necessarily a “native” member of the oppressed.⁷¹

The other fundamental way that Freire repositions the roles of the educator and educand is that both are subjects in the Freirean sense of the word.⁷² As subjects, both educands and educators do not only know the world, but also are co-participants in re-creating the world. As subject, the educand is not looked upon as object, a thing that is acted upon or manipulated, but rather as a human who acts upon and in history. As subject, the educator collaborates with the educand in the acting upon and in history. Together, they unveil reality in their critical development and understanding of the world, and transform their concrete, present reality by responding out of their new understanding of the world.⁷³ For Freire, this integrated understanding of subject and object is an educational practice of freedom where “there are no subjects who liberate or objects who are liberated, since there is no dichotomy between subject and object.”⁷⁴

How educators access the language of the people takes us to the second basic, essential component of Freirean method as articulated in his brief description: dialogical

⁷⁰ Gadotti, 7.

⁷¹ The interdisciplinary adult literacy team (i.e., educator, sociologist, psychologist, etc.) that Freire speaks of in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* are people who choose to be in solidarity with the oppressed, but who do not often emerge from the oppressed.

⁷² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 69.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Freire, *Politics of Education*, 102.

education. Dialogical education juxtaposed against lecturing occurs when there is a horizontal relationship between persons, and not a vertical relationship with the educator having power over the educands.⁷⁵ Moreover, “because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another.”⁷⁶ This essential component of the method places emphasis on the investigating, exploring, and naming of the world by both educand and educator. Both are actively engaged with one another and the world in the process of cognizing and re-cognizing themselves in and with reality. Hence, for Freire, dialogue is an existential necessity because neither educand nor educator can achieve significance as human beings without it.⁷⁷

The dialogical aspect of Freire’s method includes human and religious virtues such as love, humility, faith, trust, and hope. Although he does not present love, humility, and faith within a distinctively Christian paradigm, he does make Christian overtures to the necessity they play in entering into dialogue. In order for the educator to engage in dialogue with the educands, she/he must possess a love for the people and the world.⁷⁸ This love is necessary in order to see the educand or oppressed as human, as a creator of the world, who does not exist to be dominated by the elite. This love grounds the educator in the struggle of the oppressed towards humanization and liberation.⁷⁹ This love is passionate, yet not sentimental, because of the courage that is necessary to

⁷⁵ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 45.

⁷⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 89.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

denounce human exploitation and objectification.⁸⁰ This love becomes continually challenged in the protracted struggle against oppression of any kind, and therefore must be genuine in order to persevere. In the midst of the tensions, contradictions, and violations, the educator must not only love, but also find the strength to keep on loving. Without this profound sense of love, the educator cannot enter into dialogue.⁸¹

Like love, humility is needed in order to encounter the educand as equal, as human. In his explication on the indispensableness of humility, Freire poses a litany of rhetorical questions to illustrate his point. He asks:

How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others—mere “its” in whom I cannot recognize other “I”s? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of “pure” men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are “these people” or “the great unwashed”? How can I dialogue if I start from the premise that the naming of the world is the task of an elite and that the presence of the people in history is a sign of deterioration, thus to be avoided? How can I dialogue if I am closed to—and even offended by—the contribution of others? How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness?⁸²

These poignant, piercing rhetorical questions are provocative statements and indictments as well. They question one’s understanding of attempting to be a radical pedagogue while announcing the appropriate deportment in order to carry out the educational process. Here, Freire highlights the internal maturity and transformed worldview that must be present in the educator. Anything less constitutes a false imitation of dialogue, and is rather the traditional understanding of educator as expert and transmitter of knowledge.

⁸⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 90.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

When Freire discusses the role of faith in the dialogical educational process, he is not referring to faith in a transcendent being. Instead, he argues that the educator must possess a faith in humanity prior to embarking on the educational process.⁸³ This faith is a belief in the oppressed's ability to create and re-create the world in spite of their bleak reality.⁸⁴ In addition, it marks the educator's ability to not believe that she/he has to save or liberate the people. If there is not faith in the people, then "dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation."⁸⁵

When paternalistic manipulation occurs, trust is not established.⁸⁶ The lack of authentic dialogue does not engender the mutual trust between educator and educand that is necessary. Freire asserts, "To glorify democracy and to silence the people is a farce; to discourse on humanism and to negate people is a lie."⁸⁷

Hope, the fifth and final religious and humanistic virtue, is the intangible, yet tangible element that inspires the educator to respond to the legacy of oppression and colonization with anticipation of a world without the glaring injustices.⁸⁸ Furthermore, it enables the educator to view humanity as incomplete beings so that the ongoing search for healing, justice, and transformation in communion with the educands is intentional.⁸⁹ Hope allows for the ability to not accept reality as it is, but to dream a world that is manifested in one's action in and with the world. In the pursuit of this liberation or

⁸³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 90.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 91-92.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 91.

freedom, maintaining hope is necessary because “Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly.”⁹⁰

The significance Freire places on the role of dialogue in his teaching method cannot be overstated. Unequivocally, argues Freire, in order for the oppressed to struggle for their liberation, the educator or revolutionary leader must aim for the development of critical consciousness as an educational outcome which emerges in dialogue.⁹¹

Moreover, unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking, true dialogue cannot occur.⁹²

If the educator and the educands are not involved in an intense examination of and conversation about self and world, and their relationship to one another in and with the world, then education for empowerment, for liberation, for justice, and for social transformation becomes subverted and elusive.

Problem-posing is another component that is closely related to the incredibly dialogical nature of Freire’s method. Within the nature and scope of dialogue between the educator and educands, there must exist a problematizing of the world by the educator so that “people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation.”⁹³ Problem-posing constitutes a reframing of the world in an attempt to make it more comprehensible and less mystical.⁹⁴ With problem-posing in the context of dialogue, the educational process then becomes one of a continuous, incessant investigation and exploration of problems that leads to certain answers that then must be tested in reality to ascertain the validity or veracity of

⁹⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 47.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 92.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 83 (italics are Freire’s).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

such findings. Once the action occurs in the context that is being transformed, reflection on the action is undertaken. Therefore, problem-posing fosters an ongoing action-reflection-action transformation dynamic with self and world or, “problem posing education—which accepts neither a “well-behaved” present nor a predetermined future—roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary.”⁹⁵

To provide a more concrete example of Freire’s method to this point, a brief overview of his work in context is presented in light of his dialogical, problem-posing educational process. In the beginning phase of the Freirean method, the educators are learning the vocabulary of the group they are working with through research observations of informal gatherings of the people.⁹⁶ As stated above, the educators are being educated on the language of the people while the people are educating the professionals in the naming of their world. After hearing the language of the people, the educators select generative words that can: facilitate reading fluency, be related to other words that are phonemically related to the chosen generative words, and that lead to the speaking and reading of other words related to the social, economic, and political situation of the people.⁹⁷ This selection of generative words is phase two.

Phase three is “the creation of “codifications:” the representation of typical existential situations of the group with which one is working.”⁹⁸ In this phase, the educators must be intimately familiar with the people in order to create codifications that capture the lived reality of the people so that the people can decode their immediate and broader situation through dialogue on the codifications. Phase four is the development of

⁹⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 84 (quotation marks are Freire’s).

⁹⁶ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 49.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 51 (quotation marks are Freire’s).

the curriculum design or elaboration of the agenda to be conducted with the people, and phase five is the actual preparation of the cards to be used with the people that contain the phonemes that are related to the generative words.⁹⁹ Development and implementation of the curriculum is done with and by the people, and not merely for them. Their language, their worldview, and their oppression are integral and vital to the dialogical and problem-posing process.

The abovementioned method is Freire's literacy method, and his post-literacy method is similar with a slight variation. Instead of creating generative words after listening to and observing the people, the educators select generative themes which are found in how the people think about reality and their action on reality.¹⁰⁰ The people's praxis, their thinking about and action on reality, is given center stage in the observation and investigation so that the generative themes can be provocative towards their revisioning of the world and humanization. The post-literacy curriculum assists the once illiterate in their continued struggle in reading and rewriting the world.

With the enormous amount of responsibility that is placed on the educator, and the vast sense of empowerment experienced by the educand, one may wonder how the Freirean method negotiates the dialectic between freedom and authority. First and foremost, Freire contends that "Freedom is not the absence of limits."¹⁰¹ Freedom is not a license to do anything at anytime regardless of the consequences. Rather, freedom is an ongoing process of being and becoming by being faced with the opportunity to make

⁹⁹ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 52. A more extensive description of Freire's method and the training and supervising of educators can be found in *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 52-58.

¹⁰⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 106.

¹⁰¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, trans. Patrick Clarke (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 99.

decisions and assuming responsibility for those decisions.¹⁰² Hence, the responsibility of the educator is to respect the freedom of the educand by providing opportunities for decision-making and responsibility without relinquishing one's right and power as an educator to insure that within the educational space freedom is being practiced.¹⁰³ Whenever and wherever freedom—the right to make decisions and assume responsibility within the context of limitations—is denied, this is a violation of a person's maturity into becoming an autonomous, humanized self. Again, this autonomy is not marked by independence from or transcendence over limiting, confining situations, but is marked by being conscious of limitations and one's ability or power to respond in ways that creates alternative, life affirming choices and actions.

Dialogical, problem-posing, and freedom-based education is practiced for the purpose of developing critical consciousness as an educational outcome. In Portuguese, critical consciousness is *conscientizaco* and “it refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.”¹⁰⁴ The development of conscientization or critical consciousness is characterized by two distinct transitions. The first transition is from semi-intransitive consciousness to a naïve understanding of the world, and the second is from naïve-transitive consciousness to a more informed, critical understanding of the world.¹⁰⁵ Basically, semi-intransitive consciousness is an awareness that focuses on mere survival techniques that are reactionary in nature.¹⁰⁶ Semi-intransitive consciousness merely

¹⁰² Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 98.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 99-100.

¹⁰⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 17-18.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 17.

adjusts to reality. Injustice and oppression become a world that must be accepted instead of a world that should be transformed.

The second level of critical consciousness is naïve transitive consciousness.

Naïve transitive consciousness is characterized by an over-simplification of problems; by a nostalgia for the past; by underestimation of the common; by a strong tendency to gregariousness; by a lack of interest in investigation, accompanied by an accentuated taste for fanciful explanations; by fragility of argument; by a strongly emotional style; by the practice of polemics rather than dialogue; by magical explanations.¹⁰⁷

In this description, Freire accentuates how accommodation to the present, existential reality must be resisted in both word and deed, thought and practice. The process of reflecting on self and world, increases the oppressed's sensitivity to and awareness of once hidden, inconspicuous phenomenon.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, in the unveiling of reality, the over-simplification of problems, the nostalgia for the past, and the underestimation of the common become reconfigured in light of the developing consciousness. The educational goal is not to remain aloof from self and world in the naïve transitive consciousness state, but a move towards critical transitive consciousness, which includes a deep, insightful interpretation of problems that perceives cause and effect beyond mere magical explanations, and the ongoing investigation or examination of reality accompanied by a reflexivity of discoveries and openness to revision.¹⁰⁹

Embedded within the development of critical consciousness as an educational outcome are other outcomes that need to be emphasized. Assisting the oppressed in becoming "beings for themselves" instead of remaining as mere "beings for others" is

¹⁰⁷ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 18.

¹⁰⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 82.

¹⁰⁹ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 18.

one such objective.¹¹⁰ The residue of colonization and severe exploitation caused the oppressed to become part of structures that negated their life and humanity.

Consequently, they functioned as beings in service of another that was not out of choice or responsibility. Now, in the Freirean educational process that intervenes in the world, the oppressed must be empowered to change oppressive structures, and not acquiesce to them. Refusing to adapt, the oppressed redefine the nature of the relationship between oppressed and oppressor by becoming “beings for themselves” instead of “beings for others.”

Education for the development of critical consciousness also entails the democratizing of a society or country. As the oppressed become “beings for themselves” they begin to participate in history as subjects and not objects, as actors and not those who are merely acted upon. The making of a new society by the transforming of the old society is part of the democratic process. More specifically, Freire claims, “Here is one of the tasks of democratic popular education, of a pedagogy of hope: that of enabling popular classes to develop their language: not the authoritarian, sectarian gobbledygook of “educators,” but their own language—which, emerging from and returning upon their reality, sketches out conjectures, the designs, the anticipations of their new world. Here is one of the central questions of popular education—that of language as a route to the invention of citizenship.”¹¹¹

Before I conclude this discussion on some crucial concepts and principles of Freire’s method, a caveat is in order. Freire disapproves of referring to his approach to literacy and postliteracy as a method because it suggests a fixed, static, and acontextual

¹¹⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 74 (quotation marks are Freire’s).

¹¹¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 39 (quotation marks are Freire’s).

educational process. In responding to how his approach can be applied to race, class, and gender issues in the U.S., he argues, “What I do provide is a general framework that calls for a deep respect of the Other along the lines of race and gender. What I do provide, while avoiding universalizing oppression, is the possibility for the educator to use my discussions and theorizing about oppression and apply them to a specific context.”¹¹² Freire strongly admonishes educators in the U.S. and other contexts not to import him because there is no such thing as one size fits all. Oppression in a Latin American context is similar yet different from oppression in the U.S. Therefore, as a pedagogue of empowerment, Freire encourages educators throughout the world to understand her/his own social, political, and economic context so that they can develop and implement a pedagogy with the people instead of it being alien to the people. Freire does not provide a teacher-proof or recipe of success in any and all educational contexts, but a framework in which he can be reinvented and rewritten for one’s own context.¹¹³ In a nutshell, as Mayo asserts, “Freire’s pedagogical approach privileges context.”¹¹⁴

Academic Sources within the Pedagogy

There are some who contend that Freire has an eclectic pedagogy that is not grounded within one particular theoretical framework.¹¹⁵ These sources include the philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology, Catholic theology, and the sociological and political ideologies of liberalism and revolutionary Marxism.¹¹⁶ Moreover, there are those who argue that Marx is one of the greatest influences on Freire

¹¹² Freire, “Response,” 309 (capitals are Freire’s).

¹¹³ Antonia Darder, *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), 150.

¹¹⁴ Mayo, *Liberating Praxis*, 103.

¹¹⁵ John Elias, *Paulo Freire: Pedagogue of Liberation* (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1994), 31-46.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

even though there are numerous others such as Antonio Gramsci, Eric Fromm, Karl Mannheim, Jean Paul Satre, Che Guevara, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Martin Buber, John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, and countless others.¹¹⁷ This list includes critical theorists, developmental psychologists, psychoanalysts, philosophers, educators, cultural critics, and revolutionaries. Thus Freire seems to have embodied dialogical education as he engaged with persons and texts from various disciplines, backgrounds, and walks of life.

Time and space do not permit a thorough presentation of Freire's numerous sources. However, four particular academic sources need to be made more explicit although they were discussed above in the previous two sections. They are Freire's anthropological, historical, ethical, and Christian socialist paradigms. The first three sources are not presented in a linear fashion because within Freire's pedagogy, they are presented in a more dialectical, dynamic way. However, his Christian socialism is not nearly as explicit in most of his writings. Therefore, this aspect of his pedagogy is presented in a more linear way.

The crux of Freire's view of anthropology, history and ethics is found in the dehumanization of both the oppressed and oppressor. The oppressor has stolen the humanity of the oppressed, and thereby, the oppressor has likewise become less of a human as well.¹¹⁸ Although this distortion of humanity inflicted by the oppressor occurs in history, the dehumanization is neither fixed nor predetermined.¹¹⁹ Dehumanization, according to Freire, "is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed."¹²⁰ Nevertheless,

¹¹⁷ Mayo, *Liberating Praxis*, 4-5.

¹¹⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

the restoring of humanity to both the oppressed and the oppressor occurs when the oppressed begins to struggle for their humanization.¹²¹ The struggle of the oppressed is not for power to become oppressors of the oppressors, but power that leads to the creation of a new society and structures that humanizes both the oppressed and the oppressor.¹²²

Freire contends that the oppressed are unauthentic, unfree beings who suffer from a duality of being because the oppressed have internalized the oppressor.¹²³ In this duality of being, the oppressed are tormented by and fearful of the choices of “being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors.”¹²⁴ This unhealthy predicament of the oppressed as a result of the dehumanizing effects of being raped, abused, and exploited by the oppressor reveals the complexity of achieving one’s humanity. Likewise, the oppressor is unhealthy, too, because the oppressor only sees themselves as possessors of objects, things, and the world, those who have as differentiated from those who do not—the less than or other than human.¹²⁵

As illustrated, Freire’s understanding of dehumanization includes a psychological, social, and existential rendering of a dialectical relationship between oppressed and oppressive beings. Although this is his understanding of the human, it is the human in a distorted, perverted, and unjust order. Therefore, in order to become humanized, more fully human, the oppressed must engage in the transformation of the unjust order.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44.

¹²³ Ibid., 48.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 57-59.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 44.

Freedom or liberation from the oppressor within (internalized) and without (objective reality, something that happens to the oppressed) can occur because oppression is not a given, immutable fact nor a predetermined, fatalistic historical fulfillment.¹²⁷ The unjust order can be changed because it is a product of unjust human actions.¹²⁸

In articulating his view of history, Freire contends, the “world and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction.”¹²⁹ Freire’s understanding of the dynamic relationship between humans and the world is that what the world or reality becomes is a result of human action.¹³⁰ Humans act in and with the world as subjects, as agents, as creators. Notwithstanding, humans can be agents of justice or injustice, splendor or cruelty.¹³¹ Thus Freire sees history as a possibility, that which is being made, dynamic, and yet to come.¹³²

Freedom or autonomy within history constitutes a consciousness of one’s limit-situations and the courage to act in ways to transform the constraints.¹³³ The response to the obstacles and hindrances of one’s liberation is called limit acts: “those directed at negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting, the ““given.””¹³⁴ Each limit-situation in history is perceived differently by the oppressed. There are some who perceive the limit-situations as insurmountable, and therefore do not act in and with the world. Freire calls this lack of action an untested feasibility because the oppressed do not attempt an assertive response they remain ignorant of the possibility of what could have

¹²⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 38.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹³¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 53.

¹³² Freire, *Pedagogy of Education*, 103-04.

¹³³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 99.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

occurred had they taken a risk.¹³⁵ However, those who test the limit-situations, transform reality in the incessant struggle of encountering new limit-situations which lead to new limit-acts.¹³⁶ Ultimately, for Freire, freedom is a process that is gained the more one acts in and with reality, a political intervention in time and space that gradually restores the humanity that was stolen.

Concerning his Christian faith that was part and parcel of his admittedly politicized pedagogy, Freire admits that he was less comfortable speaking about his faith than his politics, utopian and pedagogical dreams and vision.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, the influence his Christianity had on his thought and practice is verifiable in some of Freire's writings, though limited, and those who worked alongside him.

The most extended and concentrated attention Freire gives to his Christian faith is a chapter on Education, Liberation, and the Church.¹³⁸ This chapter attempts to answer how the church in Latin American can become a site for struggle, for change, and for humanization. Like education, Freire views the church as a social institution that is political and the church must choose whether it will be on the side of the oppressed or maintain the status quo.¹³⁹ Because Freire does not believe in the existence of a neutral church, he harshly criticizes the traditional church and the modern church.

The traditional church, according to Freire, perpetuates the status quo because it operates under "the illusion that the hearts of men and women can be transformed while the social structures that make those hearts "sick" are left intact and unchanged."¹⁴⁰ The

¹³⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 102.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹³⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, trans. Donaldo Macedo and Alexandre Oliveira (New York: Continuum, 1997), 104.

¹³⁸ Freire, *Politics of Education*, chap. 10.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 121-22.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

traditional church preaches and teaches a Christianity that is too otherworldly, and thereby, overlooks this world's unjust system. Moreover, the separation between this world and the hereafter causes the oppressed to view the world as evil, sinful, and full of vice, a world that must be tolerated for what it is, instead of transformed into one less evil, sinful, and full of vice.¹⁴¹

While the modern church is much more sensitive to the good in the world such as social development and industrialization, it nevertheless maintains a disposition in favor of the oppressor.¹⁴² The oppressed continue to remain at the margins of this development because the modern church is more concerned with enhancing its bureaucracy to become more efficient in social and pastoral activities.¹⁴³ The developing, modernizing process benefits those who seek to exploit and dominate others in the name of expansion, and instead of critiquing it, the modern church blesses the supposed development.

The third kind of church, the prophetic church, "is a church as old as Christianity itself without being traditional; as new as Christianity, without being modernizing."¹⁴⁴ According to Freire, the prophetic church commits itself to the dominated classes and seeks authentic, radical social change that critiques imperialistic, elitist development or mere reform.¹⁴⁵ To accomplish this end, the prophetic church must garner the necessary tools for social analysis and theological reflection.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, this prophetic church must take after its founder, Christ, by dying in order to be born again.¹⁴⁷ This death and

¹⁴¹ Freire, *Politics of Education*, 132

¹⁴² Ibid., 133.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 135.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 137.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 138-39.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 139.

rebirth constitutes the dynamic process of being and becoming of the church so that it can remain connected to the world, yet critical of the world in living out its heavenly calling.

In Freire's discussion of these churches, he seems more as a close spectator than an intimate participant. His competency in the Christian tradition is revealed as he provides an ecclesial-social analysis, but he never clearly identifies himself as being a part of the prophetic church or any other church. This suggests that Freire did not employ his pedagogy within a church or denominational setting or it could suggest that he was not comfortable in sharing about his religious location. However, this does not negate the role Christianity played in his thought and practice.¹⁴⁸ Andreola argues that Freire's faith "was not the faith of a Christianity committed to the status quo, but rather one along the lines of a liberation theology and of laity....It was a Christianity of the strong, of fighters as envisioned by Mounier."¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, Mayo notes how Freire's connection to the Brazilian religious movement in the 1950s and 1960s influenced Freire's skills and acumen in social class analysis.¹⁵⁰ Even though Freire does not position himself within a Latin American Catholic church, his Christian roots and influence cannot be denied.

Theologically, Freire sees God as one who is present in history and pushes him towards world transformation in order to restore the humanity of the oppressed.¹⁵¹ Here, Freire is not necessarily saying that God is merely on the side of the oppressed as do Latin American and Black Liberation theologians, but he is asserting that God is a source of strength in his struggle for social justice. Concerning his prayer life, Freire states, "I

¹⁴⁸ Gadotti, 4.

¹⁴⁹ Andreola, xxxix.

¹⁵⁰ Mayo, *Liberating Praxis*, 6.

¹⁵¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, 103-04.

have always prayed, asking that God give me increased disposition to fight against the abuses of the powerful against the oppressed. I have always prayed in order that the weakness of the offended would transform itself into the strength with which they would finally defeat the power of the great.”¹⁵² This particular aspect of a present, empowering God is not responsible for the chaotic, unjust order that is at work in the world according to Freire.¹⁵³ Although God is beseeched to transform the situation, God is not the cause of the situation. Hence, those who rebel against the unjust order are not going against the will of God.¹⁵⁴ God’s will is manifested in the making of history by those who work in solidarity with the oppressed.¹⁵⁵

Religious Educators and Paulo Freire

Freire speaks voluminously and rather passionately concerning the teaching-learning process that often does not get the attention it deserves among religious educators. Although Groome admits “I am one among many religious educators who have been challenged by his [Freire] insights,” he argues that Freire does not clearly define what he means by praxis and how to develop an activity based on this approach in something other than literacy.¹⁵⁶ This critique is rather confusing because as I have attempted to illustrate, Freire’s praxis is grounded in a socio-political context that engages oppression and its causes as the core curriculum. Groome seems to be in need of a manual that would assist him in making the connection to his particular context.

¹⁵² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, 65.

¹⁵³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 61-62.

¹⁵⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, 103.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 176.

However, as previously stated, Freire needs to be reinvented instead of being duplicated or merely imported.

Unlike Freire, Groome does develop a method—a process or model that can be applied in different contexts as a stable, ready-made approach—that is nevertheless influenced by Freire. His method is called shared praxis and there are five steps or movements: “1) present action, 2) critical reflection, 3) dialogue, 4) the Story (Christianity as experienced in and throughout history) and 5) the Vision that arises from the Story.”¹⁵⁷ With the use of terms such as action, critical reflection, and dialogue, Freire’s influence is apparent. In the context of Christian communities in the U.S., Groome employs dialogue and critical reflection in order for participants to integrate the Christian story into their present action as a response to a social or church issue.¹⁵⁸ As a white male professor at a Catholic university (Boston College) working in a white middle-class context, Groome has applied his method in various contexts such as adults and high school and grade school students (in both school and parish contexts), as well as retreat, seminar, and symposia settings.¹⁵⁹

Another white male religious educator who is greatly influenced by Freire is William B. Kennedy. Along with Alice and Robert Evans, Kennedy edits a text that struggles with how to appropriate Freire within a U.S. context.¹⁶⁰ They argue that although it is difficult to translate Freire for a First World context, the use of case studies in conjunction with educational and theological commentaries on the case studies provide

¹⁵⁷ Groome, 184 (capitals are Groome’s).

¹⁵⁸ Groome, 184 -95.

¹⁵⁹ Groome, 207.

¹⁶⁰ Alice Frazer Evans, Robert A. Evans, and William Bean Kennedy, eds. *Pedagogies for the Non-Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

readers entrance into the dialogical conversation on the multiple ways and means of transformative, Freirean education in the U.S.¹⁶¹

Two African American religious educators, Olivia Pearl Stokes and Grant Shockley, have been influenced by Freire in their theoretical vision of a religious education model that addresses the oppression of African Americans.¹⁶² Both Stokes and Shockley employ Freire's praxis orientation, reflection and action, and dialogical education juxtaposed against banking education—lecturing and the transfer of knowledge—in an attempt to point to a new educational paradigm for African Americans in religious education. In addition, they integrate Freire's educational theory with Black theology (to be discussed more extensively in the next chapter). However, neither Stokes nor Shockley appeared to have implemented their liberative religious education model in a particular African American Christian context. Stokes was a member of the World Council of Churches. Then, for Shockley, a member of the United Methodist Church—a predominantly white denomination—"despite his appreciation for Freire's understanding of praxis in education, he continues to develop a model of religious education that begins with theory or theology and moves to practice."¹⁶³ Hence, the shortcoming of both Stokes and Shockley in attempting to appropriate Freire is that they start with theory instead of the unity of theory and practice in a particular context.

A more contemporary African American religious educator, Nancy Lynne Westfield, shares her liberating, empowering pedagogy influenced by Freire, and one of

¹⁶¹ Alice Evans et al., 4 -10.

¹⁶² Stokes, "Black Theology," 71-99; Shockley, "Religious Pluralism and Religious Education: A Black Protestant Perspective," in *Religious Pluralism and Religious Education*, ed. Norma H. Thompson (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988), 138-70; and "Black Theology and Religious Education."

¹⁶³ Charles R. Foster and Fred Smith, *Black Religious Experience: Conversations on Double Consciousness and the Work of Grant Shockley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 47.

Freire's heirs, bell hooks.¹⁶⁴ Within the context of the theological academy, Westfield incorporates the conscientization process of Freire, the discourse of power in King's leadership, sermons, and speeches, and the engaged pedagogy of hooks.¹⁶⁵ Skillfully she narrates her experience as an African American female educator on a class trip to Ghana which included another African American female professor, six African American students, three White students and one Puerto Rican.¹⁶⁶

In one particular defining moment, she reveals how a White female became conscious of her Whiteness in being the minority in a predominantly Black Ghana and the class but who had a difficult time naming her present disposition during group check-in time.¹⁶⁷ Exiting the group to be alone, the student flees the group and Westfield follows her student to ascertain the problem. When the student named her present feelings, "She said she had always felt 'normal,' and here in Ghana, and with this group of students and professors, she felt 'peculiarly abnormal.'"¹⁶⁸ As tears came down from her student's eyes, Westfield had to make a pedagogical decision even then. As her student was exhibiting a deep sense of shame as the result of the acute awareness of her Whiteness, Westfield chooses to be silent instead of come to the rescue of her White student because she is all too familiar with how "White students use their racist woundedness in an attempt to dominate me (Westfield), pulling me (Westfield) from my servanthood role as professor, into a role of servitude and domesticity."¹⁶⁹ In her integration of Freire, King, and hooks, Westfield reclaims herself through appropriate,

¹⁶⁴ Nancy Lynne Westfield, "Teaching for Globalized Consciousness: Black Professor, White Student and Shame," *Black Theology* 2, no. 1 (January 2004): 74-75.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 74-76.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 77. The title of the course she taught was "Post-Colonial Ghana: Religion, Cultures, and Systems of Justice," as a faculty member of Drew Theological School in Madison, NJ.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

subversive silence to allow the voice of White identity and power to be challenged by her engaged pedagogy.

Robert K. Martin, a white male theological educator, argues that nearly thirty years after Freire's publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "Interest in Freire's literacy education has been minimal among educators in general, sporadic among religious educators, and almost negligible in the local church's educational ministries."¹⁷⁰ Martin exonerates Groome and Kennedy as well as other religious educators from his indictment, but is nevertheless scathing.¹⁷¹ One purpose of this study is to examine how to appropriate Freire in an evangelical local Black church setting. As is extensively described in Chapter 4, I demonstrate Freire's influence on me in a way that highlights the strengths yet limitations of reinventing Freire.

¹⁷⁰ Robert K. Martin, "Paulo Freire's Liberationist Pedagogy and Christian Education: A Critical Investigation of Compatibility," *Koinonia* 4 (Fall 1992): 162.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

THE BLACK CHURCH AND ITS EMPOWERING PRESENCE

The oppressed in certain Latin American countries had Paulo Freire, a man who was able to organize and mobilize the masses in order for them to become self-determined. As he worked with people and for governments, political parties, and higher education institutions, Freire possessed and exercised power that inspired educational transformation that transcended the geographical boundaries of his native Brazil. However, North of Brazil, the oppressed in the U.S. of African descent found in Christianity in general and the Black Church in particular a source of strength and empowerment to address their dehumanization. As a guiding light and force in and throughout slavery, emancipation, reconstruction, segregation, racism, and White supremacy, the sacred, transcendent realm found a residence in that of the Black Church. In the Black Church, the spiritual and material, sacred and secular, prophetic and priestly, were held in tension in its struggle to lead a people and a nation towards healing and redemption. The Black Church, like Freire, sought to live in and create a more just, humane world.

It is not my intent to romanticize Freire or the Black Church. As is demonstrated in this chapter, both have their limitations. Yet, both have rich histories that can speak to the present and offer fresh insights in the protracted struggle for human liberty and justice. Towards the end of analyzing the Black Church, I first describe the historical origin of the Black Church. This description of the Black Church is from antebellum America to the Civil Rights era. Next, I turn to the development of the Black Church after emancipation and during the reconstruction era. Here I focus on the folk theology

and teaching of the Black Church in an attempt to elevate its people in the new eras. Third, the Black Church, Black Power, and Black academic theology are discussed to show the continuity and discontinuity of the theology and teaching of the Black Church during the Civil Rights movement. Finally, a critical conversation between the Black Church and Freire concludes this chapter.

The Historical Origin of the Black Church

The term “Black Church” is an academic appellation used by African American scholars dating back to the early 20th century. How the Africans born on U.S. soil were perceived by their slave masters and society at large determined the appellation used to describe their Christian religious institution. From the socially determined term of Negro to the more racially conscious term of Black are the two labels that have been used throughout history when referring to the place and manner of worship of enslaved and free dark souls and bodies. For example, sociologist W.E.B. DuBois, in 1903, published *The Negro Church* which documents the role that the several predominantly Negro denominations—African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Colored Methodist Episcopal, National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., National Baptist Convention of America, Progressive National Baptist Convention, and Church of God in Christ—and other Negro churches in predominantly white Protestant denominations played in the social, economic, and moral development of the Negro race.¹ Then, in 1921, historian Carter G. Woodson provides an American Church history that captures the various Negro denominational development as well as numerous pioneer Negro preachers who sought to change oppressive race relations and political disenfranchisement through their religion and God in his *The History of the Negro*

¹ Du Bois, ed., *Negro Church*.

Church.² In noting the diversity yet unity of these churches and the purpose of his volume, Woodson states, “there has been no effort to study the achievements of all of these groups as parts of the same institution and to show the evolution of it from the earliest period to the present time.”³ In 1963, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier’s *The Negro Church in America* was published.⁴ Frazier, in his sociological account of the Negro Church, argues that Christianity provides the social cohesion of early Negro life in their response to social and economic oppression.⁵

The change from “Negro” Church to “Black” Church in the literature occurred in the 1970s. In 1974, sociologist of religion, C. Eric Lincoln published *The Black Church Since Frazier* that provides an examination of the Black Church in the post-Frazier and post-Civil Rights eras.⁶ In 1985, social ethicist Peter Paris constructs a theological and pedagogical treatise of the Black Church in his *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*.⁷ Then, in 1990, Lincoln, in a monumental, longitudinal ten-year study, co-authored *The Black Church in the African American Experience*.⁸ This historical, sociological, qualitative, and quantitative study of urban and rural Black churches and their clergy illuminates the internal and external struggles of a culture and their faith.

Twenty-First century scholarship on the Black Church includes *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* by mother and son, Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B.

² Woodson, *History of the Negro Church*.

³ Woodson, preface.

⁴ Frazier, *Negro Church in America*.

⁵ Frazier, 8.

⁶ Lincoln, *Black Church Since Frazier*.

⁷ Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

⁸ Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church in the African American Experience*.

Pinn, and *Black Church Beginnings* by Henry H. Mitchell.⁹ Pinn and Pinn survey not only the development of the seven major Black denominations, but also include the contributions of women in leadership and ministry in the Black Church and society. Mitchell remains in the antebellum period as he vividly describes the emergence of the seven major Black denominations and their arduous labor to gain authentic independence from the white denominations, their denominational parent.

For some reason, the term “Black Church” has maintained its value and status even though the people who worship in these edifices are more commonly referred to or identify as African American. Although the term African American church has been used in the literature when referring to African American Christians in particular and the umbrella term of the Black Church in general, it is not as pervasive as the term “Black Church.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, what is important to note is that when reference is made to the “Black Church” or the older term “Negro Church,” it usually means one of the following: 1) the seven historical Black denominations, 2) a monolithic representation of the independent religious institution that has served as a bulwark in the African American community at times, and 3) a local church whose membership is predominantly African American. In some instances, scholars may employ all three connotations of the “Black Church” when describing the religious institution and experience of African Americans. Woodson’s work is one such example.

⁹ Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002); Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

¹⁰ Brian K. Blount, *Go Preach!*; and *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh: New Testament Ethics in an African American Context* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001); William H. Myers, *God’s Yes Was Louder Than My No: Rethinking the African American Call to Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994).

This general overview concerning the term “Black Church” is, unfortunately, not made as explicit in the literature as I have defined it here.¹¹ Nevertheless, from the above cited works on Black Church studies, this general framework can be gleaned, and I hope the framework is a helpful compass in providing a frame of reference when the term “Black Church” is employed.

Now, when considering the historical origin of the Black Church, attention must be given to the history of Christianity in antebellum America. The enslaved Africans did not bring Christianity with them to the U.S. although some scholars argue that they did possess a well-developed religious worldview prior to their arrival in the U.S. that was not stripped away from them during the middle-passage.¹² This religious worldview of the enslaved African encountered a religious worldview in the U.S. that deemed them as infidels who were not worthy to ascend to the superior Christian religion of that of Europeans and Euro-Americans.¹³ Along with this notion of being perceived as infidels, the Europeans had an unwritten law that Christianity and slavery could not be concomitant.¹⁴ Hence, if an enslaved African became a Christian, she/he would no longer be a slave. Consequently, proselytizing the enslaved African or Negro was not a top priority for obvious reasons. Then, another component within the religious worldview of the Europeans was that they feared insurrection by the enslaved Africans if they were given religious instruction.¹⁵ For many Europeans in America, Christianity was a religion that was designed for the superior white race, and could potentially

¹¹ Barbara Dianne Savage, “Biblical and Historical Imperatives: Toward a History of Ideas about the Political Role of Black Churches,” in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Continuum, 2001), 380-81.

¹² Frazier, 17; Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 22-26; Mitchell, 16-18.

¹³ Woodson, 1-2.

¹⁴ Woodson, 2.

¹⁵ Pinn and Pinn, 2; Woodson, 3.

obliterate the slave and master, and Black and White oppressive relationship. In this early period, Euro-American Christianity was practical in its thought and practice concerning the Negro.

Despite this pervasive religious ideology, there were some denominations who were dissenters. For example, the Quakers sought not only to convert the enslaved Africans, but also end slavery, and the Puritans were not abolitionists even though they did consider it appropriate to proselytize the enslaved Africans.¹⁶ The Methodists also took interest in providing religious instruction to the Negroes once a royal decree indicated that conversion to Christianity would not constitute manumission.¹⁷ In this vein, the tension or dilemma of propagating the Gospel as Christian service and social and economic profit was resolved as freedom of the soul from damnation could occur even though one's physical body was still in bondage.¹⁸ The enslaved Africans or Negroes were considered by these denominations to be worthy of Christianity without their religious conversion being accompanied with social freedom. Unlike the other Euro-American Christians, the Puritans and Methodists bifurcated or polarized the body and soul as if two distinct, parallel worlds existed where the spiritual one functioned without any relevance in the social, material world. Moreover, this kind of Christianity seems to be truly other-worldly because the enslaved Africans' freedom was something to be experienced in another lifetime, in a different world. Or, the Puritans and Methodists' guilt were assuaged as they promulgated the gospel to those they considered to be redeemable heathens yet chattel property.

¹⁶ Pinn and Pinn, 3.

¹⁷ Woodson, 5.

¹⁸ Pinn and Pinn, 4-5.

The political and economic influence on Christianity during the antebellum period highlights the integration that existed between church and state. The majority of the Euro-American Christians refused to share the gospel with their property because the enslaved Africans could view themselves as equal to their masters and consequently disrupt the economic system of slavery that exploited and raped both slave and master of their humanity. The status quo of separation, oppression, and racial and social caste had to be maintained because if not, Christianity would enfranchise the enslaved African with the right to vote and to be free.¹⁹ Then, the modicum of Euro-American Christians such as the Puritans and Methodists became more aggressive in proselytizing the Negro only when the church endorsed the notion that baptism or initiation into Christianity did not threaten the economic and social status of neither party. In both of these Christian camps, their religious ideology and practice was shaped by their desire to maintain power over a people in society, politics, and religion. Woodson asserts, “While struggling for liberty themselves, even for religious freedom, these Americans [many of British descent] were not willing to grant others what they themselves desired.”²⁰

The Great Awakening

Prior to the Revolutionary War, there emerged a religious revival in colonial America that transformed the theology of certain denominations—mainly the Methodists and Baptists—concerning the Negro and Christianity. The period of the first Great Awakening, 1730s-1740s, was marked by a sense of religious fervor that called into question human sin and God’s judgment on such immoral acts.²¹ The will of God had to be adhered to or else sinners would endure suffering and pain or eternal damnation as the

¹⁹ Mitchell, 27.

²⁰ Woodson, 35.

²¹ Pinn and Pinn, 6-7.

result of being disobedient.²² Furthermore, many of the revivalist preachers who proclaimed such a message considered themselves to be part of an extraordinary work of God where they were discovering instead of designing the move of God.²³ Basically, “when scores of men and women came under “conviction” for their sins and seemed to undergo “conversion,” this was constituted as an unprecedented outpouring of God’s mercy and grace.²⁴ For the first time in Colonial America, both the free and the bond were given equal access to become a part of Christianity.²⁵ However, the greatest influx of enslaved Africans into Christianity did not occur until after the first Great Awakening in 1760s and 1770s.²⁶ During this period of revivals that were different from the 1730s and 1740s, the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists offered the Virginian colony a different perspective of Christianity other than the Anglicanism that had formerly dominated the region.²⁷ With this different way of preaching and teaching Christianity that was filled with emotional, overt expression, “the Holy Spirit, broke out of the mold of the literate, formal, structured Anglican liturgy and “got loose” in the radically new “dispensation.””²⁸

According to Lambert, “Slaves filtered the revivalists’ message through their experience in bondage.”²⁹ Furthermore, some white historians even contend that African Americans saw baptism and freedom as being synonymous, and consequently, many African Americans became emboldened and empowered to resist the unjust institution of

²² Pinn and Pinn, 6.

²³ Frank Lambert, *Inventing the “Great Awakening”* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁵ Pinn and Pinn, 7.

²⁶ Lambert, 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Mitchell, 37.

²⁹ Lambert, 142.

slavery.³⁰ Gayraud Wilmore, church historian, affirms this experience of the enslaved Africans in the following statement: “But blacks have used Christianity not so much as it was delivered to them by racist white churches, but as its truth was authenticated to them in the experience of suffering and struggle, to reinforce an enculturated religious orientation and to produce an indigenous faith that emphasized dignity, freedom, and human welfare.”³¹ Hence, during and following the Great Awakening, the enslaved Africans appropriated a Christian theology and manner worship that differed from their slave masters. What they observed and heard from their slave masters was deemed as hypocritical and in many instances, disparaged.³²

The Christianity the enslaved Africans learned and/or caught as embodying freedom came from a source other than their slave masters. Or, it can be argued that while the enslaved Africans were denied access to, and had not gained reading, writing, and speaking fluency in the English language, their African linguistic system and cognitive capacity were keen in helping them to perceive falsities. For example, Frederick Douglass, an abolitionist and former slave, adamantly asserts:

What I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the slaveholding religion of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper; for, between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference—so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked....Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels. Never was there a clearer case of “stealing the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in.” I am filled with unutterable loathing when I contemplate the religious pomp and show, together with the horrible inconsistencies, which every where surround me. We have men-stealers for ministers, women-whippers for missionaries, and cradle-

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 4.

³² Ibid., 10.

plunderers for church members. The man who wields the blood-clotted cowskin during the week fills the pulpit on Sunday, and claims to be a minister of the meek and lowly Jesus.³³

Refusing to associate Christianity with what was being manifested in colonial America, Douglass reveals the freed and bond African's ability to discern authentic Christianity from the superficial posturing of their slave masters. It must have been extremely difficult for the enslaved African to imagine or conceive of a religion that promised freedom of the soul without the body. An all powerful God who gave them eternal salvation could not be so removed from and unconcerned about their present dehumanization and oppression.³⁴ Beyond the intentions of the revivalists, the enslaved Africans had a spiritual awakening that included reason because a major contradiction in the slaveholder's religion was exposed. Consequently, the enslaved Africans exercised power when they developed the invisible institution as a means to worship independently of their slave masters so that freedom of both body and soul could become a reality.

In the invisible institution, conversion was not based on "English language skill and successful rote memorization of such Christian standards as the Lord's Prayer and Psalm 23."³⁵ This Anglican way of conversion was supplanted with one that was commensurate with the revivalist fervor in the need to show remorse for one's sin and to turn away from such worldly activities as drinking, dancing, and certain styles of music.³⁶ Furthermore, as the enslaved Africans would steal away to have worship on their own terms, they met in secret places called hushed harbors where they preached sermons, sang songs, danced, and released deep intimate emotions without words, but with a shout or

³³ Cited in Pinn and Pinn, 12.

³⁴ Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 11.

³⁵ Mitchell, 28.

³⁶ Pinn and Pinn, 14.

deep moans and groans, all which addressed their yearning for freedom as well as religious development.³⁷ This invisible, yet empowering religious institution was the nascent of those visible, concrete assemblies of dark bodies and souls that were yet to come.

The Founding of Black Churches

Before the emergence of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in 1816, the first African American independent church, there were biracial or mixed churches where African Americans constituted the majority of the congregants.³⁸ Prior to the 1800s, most biracial churches or predominant African American churches were still under the control of the white denomination and members.³⁹ However, there existed a range of independence from heavily dominated by white parent denomination and congregants to subtle, creative ways of asserting freedom and self-determination by the predominantly Black congregations.⁴⁰

In general, the birth of the Black Methodists and National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., occurred as a result of racism, oppression, as well as issues of class, culture, and control.⁴¹ Concerning class, Mitchell argues that the eviction of Richard Allen, founder of the AME Church, and others from St. George's Methodist Church was due to the social mobility of the whites and the lack thereof among African Americans.⁴² Then, in First African Baptist Church, it was an issue of both class and culture because the white congregants became ashamed of their former emotionally free style of worship

³⁷ Pinn and Pinn, 13-14.

³⁸ Mitchell, 47.

³⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 51.

⁴² Ibid., 52. See full description of the incident that occurred during prayer in the church in Pinn and Pinn, 32.

once they became more economically affluent.⁴³ Finally, the white congregants were not sharing control with neither free nor bond African. When certain Africans sought the right to vote in the First African Baptist Church, it led to them being excluded as members so they eventually withdrew their right to vote.⁴⁴ In the midst of racial, class, cultural, and power struggles, the Christian African Americans sought relief from the hostility and dehumanization that constantly hounded them in the presence of the white gaze of the enslaved and free African American. In their separation or exodus and later full independence, these churches carried the theological framework and organizational structure of their white parent denomination that became fused with their struggle for survival, emancipation, and elevation.⁴⁵

As previously stated, the seven Black Churches and denominations are: African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME), National Baptist Convention U.S.A., Inc., National Baptist Convention of America, Progressive National Baptist Convention, and Church of God in Christ. AME and AMEZ churches emerged in 1816 and 1821.⁴⁶ These churches struggled after the period of the Revolutionary War and decades before the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. In 1870, soon after the Emancipation Proclamation, the CME church emerged.⁴⁷ In addition, prior to the close of the nineteenth century, National Baptist Convention U.S.A., Inc., and Church of God in Christ churches emerged in 1895 and 1896, respectively.⁴⁸ Then, the National Baptist Convention of America and

⁴³ Mitchell, 52.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 5.

⁴⁶ Pinn and Pinn, 34, 46.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 80, 117.

Progressive National Baptist Convention emerged in 1915 and 1961.⁴⁹ However, the seventh Black Church and denomination, Church of God in Christ, is the only Black Church that does not have a white parent denomination. This particular Black church and denomination has given birth to the Assemblies of God, which is a predominantly white denomination.

The Teachings of the Black Church

With no sound elaborate pedagogical framework, the Black Church as the primary voice and institution in the experience of African Americans nevertheless had its teachers who espoused a doctrine of racial uplift and emancipation through religious, moral, and literacy education. In churches, schools, and seminaries, Black laity, clergy, and denominations presented a social and theological doctrine that called into question the nation's outright dismissal of the humanity and enfranchisement of African Americans. Laity such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Mary Church Terrell, Nannie H. Burroughs, Ida B. Wells, Maria Stewart, Mary McCleod Bethune, Septima Clark, Booker T. Washington, and many others championed the cause of African Americans that was strongly influenced by their Black Christian roots. Then, clergy such as Henry McNeal Turner, Frederick Douglass, Reverdy C. Ransom, Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummel, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., and Martin Luther King, Jr. were among many ministers who led their culture, churches and denominations. Woodson speaks of the remarkable genius and bivocational nature of African American clergy in the 1800s, prior to emancipation, when he states, "During the long years of the trying ordeal, however, the Negro minister was not only compelled sometimes thus to support himself, but often had to devote part of his time to the problems of education, abolition, colonization and the

⁴⁹ Pinn and Pinn, 89, 98.

Underground Railroad.”⁵⁰ Throughout its history, the Black Church and denominations have sought to embody the parenthood of God and the kinship of humanity in its struggle for racial, social, and political justice.⁵¹

In an attempt to illustrate the teachings emanating from the Black Church, the educational content and goal of the Black Church is presented through two laywomen, Maria W. Stewart and Nannie H. Burroughs, two clergy, Reverdy C. Ransom and Howard Thurman, and two denominations, African Methodist Episcopal and National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.⁵²

Laity

Both Maria W. Stewart and Nannie H. Burroughs lived during the time when Black women were perceived as lacking morality and the virtues of White womanhood—domesticity, submissiveness, piety, and purity.⁵³ Although Stewart’s life (1803-1879) ended the year when Burroughs’ began (1879-1961), both women valiantly confronted issues of race and sex in the U.S. in an attempt to redeem a people. Stewart as a political activist and first native American female public orator and Burroughs working within the National Baptist Convention as well as the public sphere adhered to the Victorian ethic ideology of womanhood while desiring to be accepted and acculturated into American

⁵⁰ Woodson, 146.

⁵¹ Paris, *Social Teaching of the Black Churches*.

⁵² The individuals chosen for laity and clergy were done for two reasons. First, scholarship on the Black Church has mostly reflected the male clergy experience and story. The contributions of women as clergy, though many were not recognized as such, and laity in general are too often overlooked. It is my desire to show how the parts contribute to the whole, and the whole does not merely constitute the pastor. Second, as a clergy, Howard Thurman provides a similar yet different voice than many of his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. He was a scholar, educator, prophet, mystic, theologian as well as a minister who struggled for racial equality and justice in the U.S. As the pastor of a racially and religiously diverse congregation, Thurman provides a different perspective to the more traditional African American pastoral leadership of such men as Reverdy C. Ransom. The denominational focus is taken directly from Paris’ work, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*. The limited attention I am giving to this section suggests that a book is needed to examine more thoroughly and in-depth the teachings of the Black Church.

⁵³ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 47.

society by not being perceived as deviant, as other.⁵⁴ Therefore, they argued and taught that character and not color determined true womanhood.⁵⁵ In addition, they both were conscious of the racial and class biases inherent within the Victorian ethic that relegated the masses of African American women to being perceived as less than a woman.⁵⁶ Regardless of the miserable predicament, they embodied a doctrine of self-determination and empowerment for African Americans in general, and African American women in particular.⁵⁷

While teaching and proclaiming self-determination and empowerment, unlike Burroughs, Stewart had an Evangelical theological orientation that focused on eternal and temporal salvation. Stewart understood her mission to be first and foremost the saving of lost souls and then second, through God and Christianity, African American rights and liberty.⁵⁸ In this vein, Stewart proclaimed a gospel message as an orator that focused on the centrality of Christianity as a vital force in the racial uplift and freedom of the fallen daughters and sons of Africa.⁵⁹ She adamantly asserts, “Never, no, never will the chains of slavery and ignorance burst, till we become united as one, and cultivate among

⁵⁴ Giddings, 49.

⁵⁵ Giddings, 51; Nannie H. Burroughs “Not Color But Character,” in *Can I Get a Witness? Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women: An Anthology*, ed. Marcia Y. Riggs (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 86-87.

⁵⁶ Giddings, 50; Nannie H. Burroughs “The Colored Woman and Her Relation to the Domestic Problem,” in *Can I Get a Witness? Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women: An Anthology*, ed. Marcia Y. Riggs (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 87-91.

⁵⁷ Maria W. Stewart, “An Address Delivered Before the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America,” in *Can I Get a Witness? Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women: An Anthology*, ed. Marcia Y. Riggs (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 47-51; Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “Sisters Who Can Lift a Community: Nannie Helen Burroughs, ‘The Slabtown District Convention,’ and the Cultural Production of Community and Social Change,” in *If It Wasn’t for the Women*, ed. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), chap. 8.

⁵⁸ Maria W. Stewart, “On African Rights and Liberty,” in *Civil Rights Since 1787: A Reader on the Black Struggle*, ed. Jonathan Birnbaum and Clarence Taylor (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 50-52.

⁵⁹ Maria W. Stewart, “Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, The Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build,” in *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart* [book on-line] (Boston: Friends of Freedom and Virtue, 1835; accessed 10 Aug. 2005); available from http://digilib.nypl.org/dynaweb/digs/www9722/@Generic_BookTextView.

ourselves the pure principles of piety, morality, and virtue.”⁶⁰ Burroughs, on the other hand, exhibited her Evangelical conviction by providing industrial education for the masses of African American women and organizing labor unions to hold the country accountable in providing civil rights to these hardworking, self-determined African American women.⁶¹ For Burroughs, attention is given primarily to social, economic, and political concerns from her Evangelical Christian location that includes yet transcends African American Christian women.⁶² However, it must be reiterated that Burroughs worked for the National Baptist Convention, founded the National Training School for Women and Girls, and led the autonomous Women’s Convention within the denomination which all possibly entailed her comprehensive evangelistic efforts.⁶³ Or, it can be argued that Burroughs perceived eternal and temporal salvation as being integrated instead of separate. One without the manifestation of the other could be perceived as antithetical to her Evangelical Christian theological teaching.

Another aspect of both Stewart and Burroughs’s theological teaching is the assistance of God in ushering in social change. In Stewart’s speeches, she frequently mentions how God and the Holy Spirit have empowered her to stand up against her enemies which include both humans and devils.⁶⁴ Moreover, it is God who assisted Stewart in the critique of America’s racism and sexism, but also the classism in the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 220-21.

⁶² Higginbotham, 218-20.

⁶³ Evelyn Brooks Barnett, “Nannie Burroughs and the Education of Black Women,” in *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images*, ed. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic, 1997). In this chapter, Barnett notes how Burroughs dropped the name of Baptist from her school because she wanted the school to be open to women of all faiths. Black women from Africa and the Caribbean were also students in her industrial school. This suggests that Burroughs had a wider concern than evangelizing and educating women within her denomination.

⁶⁴ Stewart, “Address Delivered Before the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America,” 49.

African American community.⁶⁵ Likewise, Burroughs, through prayer, knew of God's help when the assistance of others is questionable. As the leader of the Women's Convention, Burroughs called a prayer hour in 1919 and 1920 to confront the lynching and racial injustice that was prevalent in the U.S.⁶⁶ In 1920, it was noted by a newspaper how prayer was an act of resistance because it gave these women a voice that they would not have had otherwise or risked.⁶⁷ In response to this insight, Burroughs commented, "How true! That is why all Christians pray. Their neighbors can or will not help them. God can and will. The Negro is praying because his case must go before the highest court. A just judge presides over it."⁶⁸ In essence, both of these laywomen believed in and taught that God is present to help empower individuals to stand up against apparently insurmountable odds and to bring about change that mere human hands cannot do alone.

Clergy

The indomitable presence of African American clergy has been a compass and a sign of strength and hope in the African American community. Woodson clearly articulates the numerous roles of the preacher in the African American community that includes yet transcends spiritual leader when he states, "To the Negro community the preacher is . . . the walking encyclopedia, the counselor of the unwise, the friend of the unfortunate, the social welfare organizer, and the interpreter of the signs of the times."⁶⁹ Reverdy C. Ransom (1861-1959) and Howard Thurman (1900-1981) as pastors, theologians, and educators embodied the multiple roles of African American clergy in their attempt to lead a people and a nation towards a more humane, just existence.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁶ Higginbotham, 224.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Woodson, 257.

Like Burroughs, Ransom believed in and taught the necessity of industrial education as well as economic, political, and educational civil rights.⁷⁰ In 1900, he developed the Institutional Church and Social Settlement House of the AME Church which provided “job training, child care, educational opportunities, and housing as part of their religious instruction.”⁷¹ Ransom’s integration of social, educational, and housing needs into his religious instruction suggests that spiritual formation must accompany social formation. Moreover, Christian spirituality should have some social, empirical relevance or its authenticity becomes questionable. Thus Ransom presented a social teaching and theology during a time when Reconstruction had failed, and the emergence of the Social Gospel was overlooking America’s race problem.⁷²

In his article entitled “Duty and Destiny” written in 1905, Ransom cogently articulates a vision for not only the betterment of the African American culture and Black race, but also for the nation and the world.⁷³ Establishing his foundation on the teachings of Jesus, he argues that Jesus teaches humanity not how to obtain rights in order to fulfill one’s destiny, but how to perform one’s duty as the necessary actions to accomplishing the end goal.⁷⁴ Within this religious education framework, Ransom espouses a view that humans have a duty to God and each other, and critiques subjugation, segregation, and oppression, by focusing on how to create an environment that allows for each individual, race, and nation to assume the fullest responsibility as possible for their respective destinies.⁷⁵ When a caste, racist, and classist milieu exists, it drastically reduces the

⁷⁰ Pinn and Pinn, 128.

⁷¹ Ibid., 41-42, 128.

⁷² Ibid., 127.

⁷³ Reverdy C. Ransom “Duty and Destiny,” in *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*, ed. Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 153-58.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 154.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 154.

range of choices that a person can become.⁷⁶ However, according to Ransom, a new era was springing up on American soil and in the world as the cry for solidarity was being articulated and was replacing the far too long history of segregation and oppression that had reigned for centuries in the U.S. and the world.⁷⁷ In an attempt to help usher in this new era, Ransom presents ways in which African Americans, Americans of European descent, and other races on U.S. soil could participate in the new day.⁷⁸ He succinctly states,

While other nations subjugate alien peoples, we must liberate them. While others exploit the material resources of foreign lands, we must develop them. While others force the yoke of their peculiar civilization and government upon unwilling peoples, it is this nation's mission to take them by the hand and assist them in the establishment of a form of government and the development of a civilization suited to their peculiar temperament and climatic conditions. While within our own borders, with all the commingling of races, the mantle of citizenship must be large enough to enfold them all.⁷⁹

Progressive, practical, and prophetic, Ransom speaks of and teaches about a world where duty or responsibility to God and humanity is the lynchpin for engendering right relationships within and across national borders.

Ransom's vision of a world which transcended race, class, culture, and nationality dwelled within the walls of the church in which Thurman pastored. As the founder of the Fellowship Church of All Peoples in San Francisco in 1943, Thurman at first co-pastored and then eventually became the solo pastoral leader of the first interracial and intercultural church in the U.S.⁸⁰ This church began as an experiment to answer critical

⁷⁶ Ibid., 155.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 158.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 156.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Walter Earl Fluker and Catherine Tumber, eds., *A Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon, 1998), 220.

questions for Christianity and democracy.⁸¹ Towards this Christian democratic end, the church attempted to embody in thought and practice the lofty ideals of democracy within the framework of Protestant Christianity.⁸²

The particular questions the Fellowship Church of All Peoples sought to answer were as follows:

First, is it possible to establish islands of community or fellowship in a sea of religious and social strife, with any hope of their resolving the strife? Second, is it possible for an authentic interracial and intercultural church to develop—a church that will not be largely dominated by one particular group with some other group on the fringes? Third, is it possible for a Negro and white minister to share the leadership of such a church on the basis of their respective gifts rather than on the basis of their group affiliations? In other words, in any given venture of this sort will the Negroes tend to gravitate toward the Negro pastor for leadership and counsel, and white people gravitate toward the white pastor for these same services? Fourth, how fundamental, and of what kind, will be the opposition to the development of the idea in practice, both from ecclesiastical interests and other interests of the community? What steps will be taken to neutralize its effect and to defeat its purpose?⁸³

These questions as a starting point for social and religious justice within a faith community inform the kind of ministry and religious instruction likely to take place in the church. For example, in order to answer question number one, Thurman would need to be open to different cultural groups as members while simultaneously providing education on diverse cultural groups as authentic members of the human family and not merely as objects to be tolerated. According to Thurman, a curriculum was developed that taught both children and adults from diverse backgrounds concerning other nationalities and races.⁸⁴ Furthermore, within the curriculum and church, women were

⁸¹ Howard Thurman, "The Fellowship Church of All Peoples," in *A Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life*, ed. Walter Earl Fluker and Catherine Tumber (Boston: Beacon, 1998), 222.

⁸² Ibid., 220.

⁸³ Ibid., 222.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 222-24.

included as a cultural group in which their lived experiences were affirmed and celebrated.⁸⁵ Hence, Thurman's questions became a compass for religious instruction as he and the church endeavored to make Christianity relevant for contributing to a democratic society.

Some may argue that Thurman does not belong in this discussion on the teachings of African American clergy within the Black Church because he was not related to the Black Church in any one of the three ways as defined in the first section of this chapter. Admittedly, he does not fit neatly within the discourse concerning the instruction of the Black Church. However, he is included because Thurman, as an African American, challenges scholars on the Black Church and Black churches to consider what it would mean to replace the title "Black" with a term that both represents the church's struggle for racial and social justice and the engagement of other cultures. He provides another way of being, thinking, and relating in the world that is not grounded in the false science of race, but rather as a human instilled with dignity and integrity. Moreover, Thurman is cognizant of the ways a false biology of race plays out in society, but he is all the more cognizant of the God of life and religion who desires for human interaction to exist in fellowship, understanding, and confidence instead of distrust, prejudice, and strife.⁸⁶ Thurman provides a vision for religious instruction that could allow for predominantly African American churches to be critical of injustice both within and outside of the church.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 223.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 221.

The Denominations

First and foremost, the Black denominations and congregations were responsible for launching and housing schools—literacy, secondary, vocational, colleges, and seminaries—that became the hope of the race for racial uplift after emancipation.⁸⁷ Some of the schools founded by the A.M.E. denomination are Wilberforce University in 1863, Payne Theological Seminary was founded in 1895, Morris Brown University in 1881, and Paul Quinn College also in 1881.⁸⁸ Livingstone College (1877) and Hood Theological Seminary (1903) were launched by the AME Zions.⁸⁹ With the support of white denominations such as the American Baptist Home Mission Society which “established Augusta Institute (later Morehouse College) in 1867; the Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina (1870); Roger Williams University in Nashville (1873); and Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina (1874),”⁹⁰ the newly freed U.S. descendants of African origin were finally given access to education without the fear of being penalized. A new era was emerging concerning the philosophical understanding of educating the African, and the old ones of merely education for salvation, or education for memory training, or total prohibition of education altogether were passing away.⁹¹ The harvest was so ripe that even White missionaries volunteered their time and talent for little pay in order to assist in the education of African Americans.⁹²

Unfortunately, there exists very little documentation on the educational philosophy and practice that shaped instruction in these schools. However, like the lay

⁸⁷ Mitchell, 151-61.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 151-52.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 152.

⁹⁰ Edward D. Smith, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Rise of Black Churches in Eastern American Cities, 1740-1877* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 115.

⁹¹ Alicia D. Byrd, “Adult Educational Efforts of the American Black Church, 1600-1900,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 44, no. 2 (Winter-Spring 1988): 87.

⁹² Mitchell, 142.

leaders and clergy, the Black denominations responded to their social situation of oppression and marginalization. Within this context, there were basically two prevailing educational philosophies and practices during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow epochs. They were liberal education which fostered leadership development among the Black race for racial uplift and social transformation, and industrial or vocational education which supported the development of skills and tools for economic empowerment with more of an accommodationist attitude and practice.⁹³ W. E. B. DuBois was a proponent of the first educational philosophy and Booker T. Washington the latter one.⁹⁴

Prior to the educational and philosophical contributions of DuBois and Washington, Daniel A. Payne (1811-1893), former Bishop of the AME Church, embodied an educational philosophy and practice which spoke to the intellectual, cultural, religious, and leadership development of the congregants.⁹⁵ As pastor, Payne “instituted programs aimed at correcting educational deficiencies in ministerial and lay leaders. Weekly training classes were held and ministers were encouraged to build libraries containing the Bible, a Bible dictionary, pictures, maps, psychology books, and books from other liberal arts subjects.”⁹⁶ As Bishop, he founded Wilberforce College (1863) and was instrumental in establishing Union Theological Seminary as well.⁹⁷ In essence, Payne, a forerunner of DuBois, did not believe in industrial education as a way to uplift the race, but in intellectual development alongside religious development as the

⁹³ Byrd, 90.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 89.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

means of being integrated into the American culture.⁹⁸ Furthermore, Payne had a theological presupposition in which rationality and piety were inseparable and not in conflict with one another.⁹⁹

For Payne, higher education played a significant role in restoring the loss image of God in African Americans that was induced by slavery and racism.¹⁰⁰ As enslaved beings, African Americans were not able to fully exercise their moral agency as granted by God because slavery “lays hold of the immortal mind, seizes the will, and binds that which Jehovah did not bind—fethers that which the Eternal made as free to move and act as the breadth of Heaven.”¹⁰¹ The enslaved Africans were created by God with minds to think, investigate, discriminate, and study so that they could grow in the knowledge of the truth as revealed in Jesus Christ.¹⁰² With this understanding of the psychological, social, and spiritual effects of slavery, Payne articulates a philosophy of Christian education which is commensurate with his belief in education and intellectual development as a balm, and evangelical, pietistic tradition when he states:

Christian education is that which draws out the head and heart towards the Cross, while consecrating them to the Cross, sends the individual from beneath the Cross with the spirit of Him who died upon it; sends him abroad well-fitted for a Christian usefulness, a moral, a spiritual power, moulding, coloring community, and preparing it for a nobler and higher state of existence in that world where change never comes, unless it be a change from the good to the better, and from the better to the best.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Paul R. Griffin, *Black Theology as the Foundation of Three Methodist Colleges: The Educational Views and Labors of Daniel Payne, Joseph Price, Isaac Lane* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 89.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰¹ Daniel A. Payne, cited in Griffin, 17.

¹⁰² Griffin, 82,

¹⁰³ Payne, cited in Griffin, 37.

As documented by Tyms, the Baptists focused more on the Sunday School movement in the denomination which began as a ministry to poor children.¹⁰⁴ The elementary forms of the faith—reading the Bible, praying, and training leaders—constituted the curricular aims of many African American Baptist churches, schools, and colleges. Tyms does not provide an extensive discussion of the theological tenets and educational philosophy of these Sunday School centers and college curriculum, but merely principles and policies generated by the denomination that were supposed to inform the Christian education practice in local congregations.¹⁰⁵

In his examination of the social teaching of the Black Church as represented by the AME Church and National Baptist Convention, U.S.A, Inc. denominational bodies, Paris argues,

The vision and style as well as the thought and action of the black churches have tended to be ritualistic, uncritically reflecting their respective traditions, and void of novel efforts toward change. They have been more retrospective than prospective, more priestly than prophetic, more conservative than novel.¹⁰⁶

This staunch critique of Black churches and the institutional Black Church is both grounded and unfair. There are at least three reasons why Paris's critique should be taken seriously. First, the development of Black churches emerged more from social difference and strife instead of irreconcilable theological differences.¹⁰⁷ Social reform within the church and society and not a revolution was the aim of Richard Allen and others because each predominantly Black church and denomination that eventually became independent maintained the theology and polity of their parent denominations. While prior to

¹⁰⁴ James D. Tyms, *The Rise of Religious Education among Negro Baptists* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979), 115.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 220-22.

¹⁰⁶ Paris, *Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, 94-95.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

emancipation many enslaved Africans had appropriated a Christian theology that differed from their White masters, for some reason, this theology was abandoned after emancipation. Hence, Black churches imbibed a theology and polity that was not designed to address social injustice and self-affirmation or the existential experience of the dominated. A relevant theology was and is needed.

Second, although the Black denominations could be credited for starting and maintaining numerous schools and colleges, Frazier argues that they lack educational depth and rigor because they have nurtured a narrow religious view and thwarted intellectual development among the masses.¹⁰⁸ Frazier does not elaborate on his perspective of a narrow religious view, but he could be referring to the need for a more sound theology by and for African Americans. Along with the need for a sound theology, Frazier also raises the issue of the need for the integration between faith and reason, heart and head. Although Payne's work within the AME Church suggests an example of such educational commitment, Payne purchased Wilberforce without the consent of the denomination and his school and educational efforts were widely opposed by anti-intellectuals within the AME Church.¹⁰⁹

Third, as some African Americans became more economically mobile, they distanced themselves from other African Americans in an attempt to be accepted by their White counterparts. Frazier discusses the need of middle-class African Americans for White self-affirmation and White equality, but at the expense of self.¹¹⁰ He states, "Integration for the majority of middle-class Negroes means the loss of racial identity or

¹⁰⁸ Frazier, 46-47.

¹⁰⁹ Griffin, 5, 30-31, 36, 40, 104-05.

¹¹⁰ Frazier, 81-82.

an escape from the lowly status of Negroes and the contempt of whites.”¹¹¹ Possibly, many African American religious leaders struggled with how to deal with this growing middle-class and thereby blessed this conservative attitude and behavior instead of offering a novel social and theological critique. The priestly voice drowned out the prophetic voices of Maria W. Stewart, Nannie H. Burroughs, Reverdy C. Ransom, and Howard Thurman.

In defense of the Black Church and its respective denominational bodies and local congregations, one must remember that this religious institution was able to garner the strength, economic means, vision, and courage during a time when they should have remained connected to the umbilical cord. During the changing times of slavery to Emancipation, the failure of Reconstruction, the institution of Jim Crow and perpetuation of racial segregation, the Black Church withstood constant onslaughts on its person and religious purpose from society. Maintaining a theology of the parenthood of God and the kinship of humanity,¹¹² the Black Church sought to experience, model, and affirm an integral aspect of Christianity that was not even considered by many of their White Christian sisters and brothers. The AME bishops were well aware that if this prophetic principle became embodied by the Church of Jesus Christ, then this particular mission of the Black Church would end.¹¹³ The mission of the Black Church prevailed through the terrorism and counteraction of the Klu Klux Klan, and the lynching of Black children, women, and men. Neither of these dehumanizing forces could annihilate the force that was active in the Black Church. No other Black institution in America has had to take

¹¹¹ Frazier, 82.

¹¹² Paris, *Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, 10. The sexist rendering of this statement which is more akin to the language used in the Black Church is the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

on so much with such meager material means and with leaders, as previously noted by Woodson, having to be more than just spiritual leaders. How can one offer a more just critique of the Black Church in ways that honor its unprecedented past, but challenges it to renew itself or experience the ongoing resurrecting power of God in its inherently priestly and prophetic function?

The Black Church, Black Power, and Black Academic Theology

During the time of the Civil Rights Movement and beyond, the Black Church has been harshly criticized by outsiders as well as some of its members. The Nation of Islam and Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party and Black Nationalists, and trained Christian theologians of African American descent such as James Cone all condemned the Black Church for being too other-worldly and thereby irrelevant in responding to the glaring injustices during the 1950's and 1960's which plagued the African American community. King's teaching and practice of a nonviolent philosophy coupled with a theology of justice, love, hope, and liberation found within the Black Church tradition challenged America towards a vision of the beloved community where all persons are equal.¹¹⁴ However, the Nation of Islam and its once prominent representative Malcolm X accused King of disarming African Americans of the power that was necessary to withstand and overcome White supremacy.¹¹⁵ In the midst of this religious, social, and political hotbed, the National Committee of Negro Churchmen and Black academic theology emerged as the voices in an attempt to integrate Black Christian theology and Black power, and

¹¹⁴ James Cone, "Calling the Oppressors to Account: God and Black Suffering," in *Living Stones in the Household of God: The Legacy and Future of Black Theology*, ed. Linda E. Thomas (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004), 6.

¹¹⁵ George M. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 290.

provide the ongoing direction of the Black Church in the midst of the changing social and political tides.

On July 31, 1966, the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (NCNC), comprised of male clergy with the exception of one female non-clergy member within both Black and White denominations, issued a statement in response to the various caricatures and distortions of the term “Black Power.”¹¹⁶ The growing social and political unrest in the U.S. and particularly in the nation’s urban centers by many young African Americans was capturing the attention of many. The cry of Black Power—the right to become a self-determined people and protection from racist violence—which emanated from these young African Americans was to some a new voice, but to NCNC it was merely an age old problem of power and race that had plagued the country since the arrival of the first Africans.¹¹⁷

In their recapitulation of the oppression of African Americans by Euro-Americans, the NCNC reframed the problem within the context of power and Christian conscience. By appealing to leaders of America, White churchmen, African Americans, and the mass media, they challenged the country to examine its democratic principles and Christian claims in light of the glaring abuses of power, freedom, and justice in the U.S. Claiming that the political upheaval was an act of God’s judgment on the nation because of its failure to serve people both at home and abroad, the NCNC dismissed the notion that African Americans were somehow out of order or disturbing the peace.¹¹⁸ Although they deplored the eruption of violence and riots that occurred in the ghettos, they

¹¹⁶ National Committee of Negro Churchmen, “Black Power,” in *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, by Peter J. Paris (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 137.

¹¹⁷ Frederickson, 293-94; National Committee of Negro Churchmen, 137.

¹¹⁸ National Committee of Negro Churchmen, 138.

contended “it is more important to focus on the real sources of these eruptions.”¹¹⁹

According to NCNC, the riots in numerous inner-cities across the nation were the direct result of the silent and covert violence that was being inflicted on African Americans by White middle-class Americans.¹²⁰ The decisions of American leaders categorically left many African Americans in ghettos “without jobs in a booming economy; with dilapidated and segregated educational systems in the full view of unenforced laws against it; in short: the failure of American leaders to use power to create equal opportunity *in life* as well as *in law*—this is the real problem and not the anguished cry for ‘black power.’”¹²¹ From their Christian perspective, there is nothing inherently evil about desiring power.¹²² However, when there is an unequal distribution of power and when a nation, race, or organization attempt to ape God who has ultimate power, then the issue of power needs to be called into question.¹²³

In their specific appeal to African Americans, they argue that organizational power is the kind of power that is necessary and should be sought after; it does not reside outside of the African American.¹²⁴ Organizational power is already possessed to some degree by African Americans, but it must be nurtured and developed.¹²⁵ In the process of procuring power, reconciliation with self and group must occur so that African Americans would be aware of the depth of resources that already lie within.¹²⁶ Furthermore, the development of organizational power would engender a healthy sense of

¹¹⁹ National Committee of Negro Churchmen, 138.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 138-39 (italics in original).

¹²² Ibid., 139.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 141.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

self so that self-hate could be replaced with self-love, and allow for a more authentic sense of respect for both self and others.¹²⁷

James Cone in his seminal Black theological treatise, *Black Theology and Black Power*, provides a more thorough rendering of the relationship between power and Christian consciousness.¹²⁸ In his definition of Black Power, he asserts

It means complete emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deem necessary. The methods may include selective buying, boycotting, marching, or even rebellion. Black Power means black freedom, black self-determination, wherein black people no longer view themselves as without human dignity but as men, human beings with the ability to carve out their own destiny. In short, as Stokely Carmichael would say, Black Power means T.C.B., Take Care of Business—black folk taking care of black folks' business, not on the terms of the oppressor, but on those of the oppressed.¹²⁹

Consistent with the NCNC, Cone defines Black Power as that element or force that can launch African Americans into a new way of being and relating in the world. This potential economic, political, social, ethical, and psychological reorientation of African Americans infused by Black Power challenges the oppressor to rethink the fallacies that have shaped the oppressor-oppressed relationship. Moreover, Black Power as defined by both Cone and NCNC unapologetically announces the humanity of African Americans and the evil, dehumanizing practices of their oppressors. Then, when Cone's theology is added to this understanding of Black Power, liberation for the poor and oppressed Black people of the world is synonymous with the agenda of the God in Christianity.¹³⁰ More specifically, "Christianity," argues Cone "is essentially a religion of liberation," and any expression of Christianity that does not coincide with the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ

¹²⁷ National Committee of Negro Churchmen, 141.

¹²⁸ James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969; reprint, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

¹²⁹ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 6 (italics in original).

¹³⁰ James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970).

of the oppressed is not to be considered part of the Christian religion.¹³¹ Hence, both Black Power and Christian consciousness are an awakening of the life-giving, humanizing truths and treasures that exist within African Americans and Christianity.

Cone unveils the meaning of God through the eyes and experience of and for the marginalized Black community.¹³² This subversion of Western Christian theology positions God on the side of the oppressed and consequently against the White oppressor.¹³³ For Cone, the disenfranchisement of African Americans is a starting point for theological inquiry and explication instead of abstract, intellectual language that is usually far removed from the way African Americans have experienced the world and their Christian God. Moreover, Jesus, the revelation of God to humanity, is seen as the liberator of the oppressed.¹³⁴ Because of the liberating work of Jesus, humanity has access to and knowledge of God's action in history and humanity's position of freedom in time and space.¹³⁵ Using historical, theological Trinitarian language, Cone presents a God-talk grounded within the existential experience of the Black community. In this vein, rebellion and resistance to unjust systems and laws are not antithetical to Christianity because "Black rebellion is a manifestation of God himself actively involved in the present-day affairs of men for the purpose of liberating a people. Through his work, black people now know that there is something more important than life itself."¹³⁶

Concerning Christian freedom and Black Power, the notions of self-identity and self-determination as exhibited in Black Power are affirmed in Cone's theological

¹³¹ Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 11-12.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

¹³⁴ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 34-35.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

construction of freedom. For Cone, freedom does not merely constitute the Western classical sense of acting without limits, constraints, or coercion.¹³⁷ This notion of freedom views humanity as an independent being/self that must become autonomous from any social institution, community or law that would hinder one's ability to act as she/he wills. Freedom includes more than this for an oppressed people whose right to be have been by and large defined for them, and thereby negating their humanity. Therefore, it restores that which has been taken, and that is the ability to become what one should be—a human.¹³⁸ This understanding of freedom is grounded within a social, relational context unlike the classist definition. Furthermore, Cone argues that God became a human in Jesus Christ so that every human could be liberated from that which hinders, oppresses, and enslaves humanity from being an authentic, actualized, mature human.¹³⁹ Hence, the common thread between Black Power and Christianity is the liberation of the oppressed to be what they were created to be—human. However, “Freedom” according to Cone “is not a gift but is a risk that must be taken. Liberation is a process to be located and understood only in an oppressed community struggling for freedom.”¹⁴⁰ Although God is active in the world on behalf of the oppressed and Jesus Christ has entered history to make known to humanity God's justice, oppressed communities must become participants or co-laborers with God in the liberation process instead of thinking that freedom is something that will automatically come to them.

¹³⁷ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 39.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ James Cone, “Black Theology and the Black Church: Where Do We Go From Here?” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., ed. James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 273.

Cone speaks briefly yet clearly on the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. He contends that “the Holy Spirit is the power of God at work in the world effecting in the life of his people his intended purposes.”¹⁴¹ Moreover, the Holy Spirit is perfecting not only sanctification and justification in the private life of the believer, but also working in and through the believer to engage the world in order to confront the evil and the suffering of humanity.¹⁴² Total surrender to the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit positions one to both live and die for God;¹⁴³ as God confronts evil and oppression through God’s Spirit, the believer also is engaged in a process that is costly and requires a tremendous amount of sacrifice, discipline, and trust in God to embody the effectual, redeeming work of the Holy Spirit.

The most radical components of Cone’s Black theology are his claims that God is Black, Jesus needs to be seen as someone other than a white man with blonde hair and blue eyes, and white people must become Black or in solidarity with the oppressed, victimized Black race. First, God is neither colorless nor white, but Black because God is understood in a way that identifies with oppressed people.¹⁴⁴ Likewise, Jesus is the Black Christ, one who suffers with the marginalized, and is manifested in the struggle against white oppression.¹⁴⁵ Hence, Christ “is those very black men whom white society shoots and kills. The contemporary Christ is in the black ghetto, making decisions about white existence and black liberation.”¹⁴⁶ Finally, Cone unabashedly argues that White people must join the cause of the oppressed in order to be identified with the victim by becoming

¹⁴¹ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 57.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁴⁴ Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 120-121.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

emancipated from one's unjust access to and manipulation of power.¹⁴⁷ In joining the struggle for the liberation of oppressed Blacks, White people experience what it means to be human as well.

According to Roberts, another Black theologian, Cone's Black theology is neither Christian nor one of Black power because Cone has not taken a definitive side between what Roberts deems as two extremes.¹⁴⁸ Roberts argues that Cone's theology does not go far enough within the Christian tradition in general and the Black Christian religious experience in particular. Love and reconciliation are cornerstones within both traditions, but Cone's focus is on the establishment of a Black nation-state on a piece of U.S. soil without any need or desire for being reconciled with the oppressor. Hence, Cone articulates a theology for many Blacks who are angry, but who are not Christians, and for many Black Christians who find the affirmation of separation to be antithetical to their faith though they may be in rage as well.¹⁴⁹

Roberts positions himself squarely within the context of Christian theology, but with sensitivity towards the outcry of Black Power among predominantly Black youth who are not Christians.¹⁵⁰ He understands his role not as a theologian who interprets Black Power, but as one who examines and elucidates the Christian experience of Black people.¹⁵¹ In using this approach, asserts Roberts, "One runs the risk of being misunderstood by black militants and moderates as well as by white radicals and liberals. The only encouragement is the urgency and need arising from the new situation."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 171.

¹⁴⁸ J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 5.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 5-6.

In addressing the moment of Black crisis, Roberts' Black theology engages in a type of ministry to both Blacks and Whites.¹⁵³ Caring for African Americans who are victimized by racist oppression is necessary as the Black theologian illumines the priestly message of deliverance and hope within the Christian tradition.¹⁵⁴ Then, for those Blacks and Whites who do not want to hear the theological exegesis of race relations, the words of the Black theologian will be prophetic.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, in the priestly and prophetic like ministry of Roberts' Black theology, there exists a clarion message for the need of reconciliation that goes beyond confrontation and liberation.¹⁵⁶ Black people's deliverance from the unhealthy, unjust relationship with their White oppressor is only for a season in order to become united and empowered.¹⁵⁷ Separation is not permanent, but rather a necessary progression in the ultimate goal of experiencing reconciliation—an integral part of Christianity.¹⁵⁸ Hence, for Roberts, the ultimate goal of reconciliation between Blacks and Whites includes a time of distance for those White Christians who are not ready to heed the prophetic voice yet priestly stance of Black Christians.

Like Cone, Roberts contends that Black people must set the agenda for liberation.¹⁵⁹ However, unlike Cone, Roberts states, "Christians who have had so much to say about love and human understanding should lead in cross-cultural exchanges between blacks and whites."¹⁶⁰ Here, Roberts does not make reference to the color line, but to the presence of the redemptive elements within Christianity by both Blacks and Whites who exhibit and/or embody the humanization of the other. Black and White

¹⁵³ Roberts, 6.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 11-12.

Christians who have experienced the redemption found in God's love and restoration of self and other are both equipped to assist in ushering in interpsychic, interpersonal, intercultural, and institutional healing and justice on a broader scale. Consistent with his theme of liberation and reconciliation, Roberts articulates a Black theology that challenges U.S. Christians of both African and European descent to consider how to walk together as a demonstration of God's reconciling activity in and of the world.¹⁶¹

As a revelatory religion, Christianity speaks of a God who reveals God's self in and to the world.¹⁶² In God's unveiling of self, Roberts asserts, "God speaks to the human condition. God speaks savingly to humans in a particular historical and cultural setting."¹⁶³ Therefore, in the midst of Black oppression and the negation of humanity and life, God speaks. God speaks to redeem God's self or image in creation and humanity.¹⁶⁴ God is not removed from the present situation, but is active in revealing to humanity God's providential care for those deemed as the least in society even though the oppressed have a socially marginal existence. In order to penetrate this dismal plight, God's revelation to Blacks is grounded in their existential experience. This "revelation to blacks," Roberts argues, "is a revelation of Black Power, which includes black awareness, black pride, black self-respect, and a desire to determine one's own destiny."¹⁶⁵ In the process of Black people experiencing God's revelation, the self integrally connected to and identified by the darker-hued skin "is enabled to transvaluate

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶² Ibid., 37.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 38. The word "savingly" is Roberts'.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 39.

skin color into something comely and desirable, because a new self-understanding is now lifted up into the very creative purpose of God.”¹⁶⁶

Each in his own way, Cone and Roberts concern themselves with demonstrating how the God of Christianity has not forsaken African Americans. Unfortunately, although both claim to be speaking for and from the Black community and Black Church, their theological projects have remained mostly contained within the theological academy.¹⁶⁷ Although Paris notes that Roberts more so than Cone is given credit for struggling to be relevant to the Black Church, still, neither one adequately achieves this end.¹⁶⁸ Some African American religious scholars attribute the alienation of Black theologians from the Black Church to the Eurocentric derived theological method and sources.¹⁶⁹ Then, there are those who view the chasm in terms of the intellectual, systematic thought of Black theologians being disassociated from the creeds, doctrines,

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). Andrews provides a sound, thorough critique of both Black theology and Black churches in order to shape a vision for how the two can be reconciled. He claims that Cone's Black theological project misdiagnoses the problem in Black churches by accusing Black churches of losing its prophetic edge. Moreover, Andrews argues that Black churches have not lost their prophetic edge, but have been strongly influenced by American individualism which has weakened the Black church's ability to be prophetic and a house of refuge. In essence, Black churches have lost their way amidst the consumerism and individualism that are prevalent in the U.S. Also see Cone *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 5-28. Cone discusses the emergence of the term "Black Theology" and credits the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (NCNC) for being pivotal in providing the first radical response to the growing crisis in America's urban centers in late 1960s. As Black theologians in the academy began to articulate a response as well, their discourse developed independently of these clergy. The clergy lacked an informed theology to sustain them in many White denominations, and the Black theological academicians launched their attacks in White academies that were far removed from the pastoral realities of the clergy. The need for tenure and promotion neutralized the radical potential of Black theologians, and eventually African American theologians became engrossed in scholarship that did not really reflect the then contemporary Black religious experience.

¹⁶⁸ Paris, *Spirituality of African Peoples*, 15.

¹⁶⁹ Victor Anderson, "Critical Reflections on the Problems of History and Narrative in a Recent African-American Research Program," in *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins*, ed. Eleazar S. Fernandez and Fernando F. Segovia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 38.

and liturgical practices of African American congregations.¹⁷⁰ However, Anderson attributes the alienation to a “faulty equivalence operative throughout the slave-narrative research program” as employed by first and second generation Black theologians.¹⁷¹ The slave-narratives are theologically exegeted in a way that equates the enslaved African experience and God talk of “struggle-protest, survival, resistance, and hope in liberation or black radicalism” to the theological framework of Black theologians.¹⁷² In this faulty analysis, contemporary Black churches, and not Black theologians, are disconnected from their historical roots of Black protest; nineteenth century Black evangelicalism is synonymous to contemporary Black liberation.¹⁷³ For Anderson, nineteenth century Black evangelicalism is not the same as Black liberation theology but represents a theology of the Second Great Awakening that was grounded in a spirituality and piety of conversion experience. Hence, Black theologians lump together antebellum and post-Civil War Black religion in ways that do not allow for the different historical and contemporary understandings of freedom and religion to be properly examined.¹⁷⁴

Contemporary social scientific research on African American Christianity helps to illumine the lack of liberative elements in the Black religious experience. A growing body of literature indicts Black churches by claiming that they have become the opiate of the people because Black churches dissuade or discourage African American Christians from engaging in the political arena.¹⁷⁵ Manning Marable, a leading social scientist, argues that the politics of the Black Church has been ambiguous at best, and irrelevant at

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 46.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 47.

¹⁷⁵ Fredrick C. Harris, *Something Within: Religion in African-American Political Activism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5-6.

worse in the liberation of African Americans because its reason for existence is divided.¹⁷⁶ Marable envisions the division or dichotomy as the minister who is concerned with how to survive in a racist/capitalist America on one hand, and the minister who is actively involved in the public arena in order to confront the evils of oppressive systems on the other hand.¹⁷⁷ Both poles are flawed in Marable's mind because of the finiteness Christianity places on the individual in the human's corrupt, sinful nature.¹⁷⁸ However, Marable's solution is for the Black Church to disown its Christian heritage of human sin and God's revelation in and to the world in order to adopt a Gramscian humanitarian understanding of the self that has the full potential to create and transform both self and world without being acted upon by a transcendent, divine being.¹⁷⁹

Within the Black Church tradition, many African American Christians are both subject and object, active and passive, anticipating and discerning what God is bringing to humanity as God acts in, through, and on the believer (eschatology) while choosing to participate in God's work in the world. Thus, if Marable wishes to speak to the Christian experience of African Americans, he must understand this dialectic, this paradox, that is part and parcel of how many African American Christians negotiate both this world and the other-world. The Black Church as a religious institution does not have the convenience or luxury of being concerned only with the material, social world or the spiritual, transcendent one. The Black Church has to engage both, and this is a daunting task. Instead of asserting that the Black Church is ambiguous or divided, a fair critique would be to Black churches who have become "so heavenly minded until they are no

¹⁷⁶ Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society*, updated ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2000), 213.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

earthly good” or so materialistic until piety is equated with economic prosperity in this lifetime.

This discussion on the alienation of Black theologians from Black churches suggests another thing that has not been raised. There exists a need for novel methods and research designs to be employed by Black theologians that allow for the contemporary stories and experiences of particular Black churches and African American Christians to speak for themselves. Broad, sweeping generalizations or categories of the Black religious experience have the tendency of reducing the Black religious experience without allowing the people to give shape and form to how they are making meaning of the proposed phenomenon. Terms such as “oppression,” “freedom,” “liberation,” and “justice” may have different nuanced meanings in different historical epochs even though the Black race is still the oppressed and the White race is still the oppressor.

Furthermore, as Anderson clearly articulates, while there are probably continuities between the past and the present in the Black religious experience, the tendency to impose one’s present theological orientation on the past is a temptation that must be resisted. How professional Black theologians are able to resist this temptation will depend in large part on their ability to deal with their own identity crisis in the academy. Becoming an authentic, whole self in general, let alone in the academy, is no easy task. Yet, Black theologians must rise to the challenge if they are to be relevant to and in Black churches and the Black community. The sociological framework of Lincoln and Mamiya can provide some additional assistance to the study of the Black Church and African American Christianity because they argue that “black churches are involved in a dynamic

series of dialectical tensions.”¹⁸⁰ These six dialectical tensions are priestly and prophetic, resistance and accommodation, charismatic and bureaucratic, community and privacy, universalism and particularism, and other-worldly and this-worldly.¹⁸¹ Without this dialectical understanding, one side of the polarity becomes the dominant paradigm of explaining black churches which leads to a misunderstanding and misdiagnosis of the experience and contribution of the Black Church.¹⁸²

The complexity of the Black religious experience and life is paradoxical in many ways. Therefore, there is a need for the Black theologian to begin to struggle with how best to access, interpret, and convey the particular yet diverse Black religious experience. In becoming relevant to the struggle for justice within a faith community, Black theologians can inspire hope in Black churches and communities who are merely accepting the status quo, and come alongside those Black churches and communities that are presently committed to experiencing God’s justice here on earth and in the hereafter.¹⁸³

The Black Church and Freire: A Critical Correlation

To begin a conversation between the Black Church and Freire, some obvious differences must be noted. First, I am comparing a religious institution mostly comprised of the oppressed African American in North America to a Latin American male who experienced life as both oppressed and oppressor. Second, the center of social activism

¹⁸⁰ Lincoln, and Mamiya, 16.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 12-16.

¹⁸² Ibid., 16.

¹⁸³ In this section, the voice of Womanist theologians is not included because this body of literature emerged after the Black Power movement and the subsequent response of the Black Church and Black academic theology of such scholars as Cone and Roberts. Furthermore, as was noted and discussed concerning the lack of relevance between the Black Church and the Black theology of Cone and Roberts, this critique would also apply to Womanist theologians. Their work is a critique of the omission of Black women’s religious experience in scholarship and the academy in literature and history that does not necessarily reflect contemporary Black women’s religious experience.

for many African American Christians is the Black Church and religion strongly influenced their social and theological teachings. Unlike African Americans in the Black Church, although Freire has Christian roots, he does not employ his pedagogy within religious contexts such as churches even though he does integrate his Christian identity in a subtle way within his pedagogical framework. Freire must be understood as an educator who was Christian, but not necessarily as a Christian educator. In order to properly critique him, he must be allowed to be a socially, politicized educator who worked mostly with post-revolutionary societies, social organizations, political parties, primary and higher educational institutions, and labor unions. Finally, although this point may be debatable, the Black Church has a more developed theology on education political activism than Freire and Freire has a more developed philosophy on education and political activism than the Black Church.¹⁸⁴

In general, the major commonalities that exist between the Black Church and Freire are: 1) literacy development of the oppressed, 2) democracy as the social, political ideal to be achieved, and 3) human freedom and the development of cultural and individual consciousness. These similarities are followed by one significant way in which Freire can speak to the Black Church and the difficulty of appropriating Freire in the Black Church.

Both before and after emancipation, the Black Church and community were eager to learn the printed code found on the pages in the Bible and other books. Literacy was

¹⁸⁴ Freire's chapter "Liberation, Education, and the Church," in *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1985) provides a solid theological framework for how progressive, radical churches should function in the world. However, the three classifications of the church's role in society have a deep structure that is consistent with his three levels of conscientization. Hence, his philosophy is driving his theology even though he uses the appropriate Christian symbols and language to communicate how the church can become an agent of liberation.

the key to compensate for the years of denial of the right to decode and encode the English language, and to prepare oneself to function and advance in the pseudo-independence after slavery. Having the ability to read the word was commensurate with the fulfillment of being accepted as an equal citizen in a society where being disenfranchised was the norm. Black churches, as either the custodians or developers of schools, provided the necessary infrastructure to insure that the masses of illiterate Black children and adults would have access to sound literacy instruction that would uplift the community and race.¹⁸⁵

Freire was more politicized in his literacy development agenda than the Black Church. Reading of the word or literacy development was not merely to become part of the capitalistic system that left humans at the expense of their exploitative employers. Freire instructed the adults in Brazil in reading the word so that they could become more literate in decoding the world as well. His campaign engaged the worldview of the masses so that a deconstruction of their existential situation would expose causes and contradictions that could be responded to by the adult Brazilians' direction action. Hence, for Freire, literacy education was more than just cultural uplift and advancement. It was the means by which one could redefine the world as they took action to rewrite and reinvent self and history.

Democracy, as understood and defined by many Black Christians in this country, has been the affirmation of the ideals found in the country's Constitution, Declaration of

¹⁸⁵ Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) provides a discussion on the history of schools founded by both Black and White women in the late 18th century to emancipation that focus on the preparation of Black female teachers as educators in order to teach and reach their own race. In addition, she documents testimonials of both Black and White women who endured violence such as flogging and raids by the Klu Klux Klan, economic hardship because of a lack of support, and other forms of resistance that did not stop the spirit of these women from educating the Black masses. During this era, teaching was the only respectable way for women to earn a living. See pages 75-77, 83-110.

Independence, and Bill of Rights. With the wholesale use of these documents and adherence to what they could yield if properly practiced, Stewart, Burroughs, Ransom, Thurman, and other African American Christians such as King appealed to them in order to call into question White America's hypocrisy in failing to live out the democratic ideals. Thurman took it a step further by attempting to provide the country with a model of democracy within the context of Protestant Christianity. After the Second World War, he possibly drew weary of America's continued failed attempt at justly caring for its people. From Slavery to Emancipation to Reconstruction to Jim Crow to the Civil Rights Movement of 1950s and 1960s to the Post-Civil Rights era, the Black Church has espoused a view of democracy—which is deemed as conservative by Black Nationalists and Black Socialists or Marxists—that has attempted to make democracy a reality.¹⁸⁶ In essence, the Black Church struggled to revolutionize a society that remained unmoved by its chasm between democratic theory and practice.

Alongside this social understanding of human relationships, the Black Church's theology of the parenthood of God and kinship of humanity empowered them to not give up on the hope of reconciling with their White sisters and brothers in the church and society. Thurman notes the power of being called a child of God that was preached to his enslaved grandmother by one of the enslaved ministers. Thurman recalls:

I shall always remember one of the things she said to me one Sunday morning. She told me about how she made that discovery as a little girl on this plantation. The minister, who was one of the slaves, was permitted now and then to have a

¹⁸⁶ Jonathan Birnbaum and Clarence Taylor, *Civil Rights Since 1787: A Reader on the Black Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2000) documents the speeches, sermons, and other publications of both Black Christians and activists in the protracted struggle for equality in the U.S. The extensive volume highlights the different approaches and perspectives taken by each author in their particular era all with the aim of liberating Black folks from the chains of physical and psychological slavery, and for the Christians, spiritual slavery as well. See also Mary McLeod Bethune's "What Does American Democracy Mean to Me?," in *Say it Plain: A Century of Great African American Speeches*, ed. Catherine Ellis and Stephen Drury Smith (New York: New Press, 2005), 11-14.

religious service for all the slaves on that plantation and the neighboring plantation. And he always had the same sermon to preach, the essence of which was this. 'Look at you, look at you. You, you are not slaves. You, you are God's children.' And after the long silence that passed after she'd tell me this then she would add, 'Nothing else really matters.'¹⁸⁷

This spiritual, social notion of the self as internalized by Thurman's grandmother allowed her to refute and renounce her then present condition of slavery. Some might consider this response by Thurman's grandmother and the minister who proclaimed it to be psychological naiveté or escapism. However, Thurman grounds the deep, sustaining meaning of such an empowering truth when he states,

Now that may seem like a very naïve defense mechanism that has no significance beyond the temporary reinforcement of the ego at a moment of attack. But no! It gave her and to those like her and to their offspring, a sense of roots that was watered by the underground river of existence. And this is the discovery that the prodigal son made in the lesson, when he came to himself, when he cut down through all the levels until he hit this hard core, it was, at once to him, going back to his father. When he came to himself, he came to his father. When you come to yourself, you come to your father. And the tranquility that pervades all the levels of your life announces in everything you do, community, wholeness, integration!¹⁸⁸

Could this theology be a big part of the reason why Thurman was empowered to be a self in the midst of other cultures, races, and ethnicities in The Church for the Fellowship of All Saints? Could this theology be the reason why he was able to write extensively on life in the Spirit in ways that reflected his integrated, healed, and whole self without having to be approved by White Americans because he knew they were his equals and not superiors?¹⁸⁹ Without a doubt, Thurman's abiding presence with his Godly parent provided him with the necessary resources to resist and persist, to be and do, and to

¹⁸⁷ Howard Thurman, "Community and the Self," in *Say it Plain: A Century of Great African American Speeches*, ed. Catherine Ellis and Stephen Drury Smith (New York: New Press, 2005), 40.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ See Thurman *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1949; reprint, Richmond, IN: Friends United, 1981); *The Luminous Darkness: A Personal Interpretation of the Anatomy of Segregation and the Ground of Hope* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); *Disciplines of the Spirit* (Richmond, IN: Friends United, 1963).

announce and renounce a world that approximated America's democracy and Christian Protestant's theology of equality.

In what he deems as a post-colonial and post-revolutionary context, Freire's vision of democracy is not revolutionary in nature. Early on he argued that his pedagogy could only be practiced in a post-revolutionary society because it required the cooperation of a radical government in a Latin American context that sought to move from its backward, illiterate, anti-dialogical, and elitist condition to one that took seriously the empowerment of the masses through literacy and dialogical education. While this may seem like a top-down form of social transformation and empowerment, it is not entirely driven by the elite, educated, and the powerful. Freire realized that a systematic, comprehensive effort was necessary to engender a continual progression towards democracy in the already/not yet transitional post-revolutionary context. In his mind, without a supportive, innovative government, the masses would be struggling from below without the necessary conditions and wherewithal to effect widespread change. Hence, Freire holds both the government and the people accountable in the realization of the democratic nation. Although Freire softened this position in his later writings, he never relinquished the idea of the need for collaboration and cooperation between the rich and the poor, the literate and illiterate, and the elite and the masses. In essence, democracy building includes the "other" as both the self and other are made a new in the partnership.

Unlike the Black Church in the U.S., Freire can not draw upon democratic principles or theory that existed in his Latin American context. In a post-colonial and developing world, democracy is something that must be created and nurtured in the midst

of action and reflection. The ethical response and then subsequent reflection on the response by the masses become the raw material of contributing to the new way of being and relating in the world. Action and reflection give shape and substance to democracy in ways that flow from the people's engagement with and in their world. This ongoing process of doing and thinking is part and parcel of the human vocation that the oppressed embark on in their quest for personhood and community.

In general, both the Black Church and Freire view human freedom as a right to be a self, a human. Unfortunately, the right to be human is negated by the oppressive conditions that both African Americans and Latin Americans experience. Therefore, self-determination and self-pride are integral components in the development of consciousness for African Americans and Latin Americans.¹⁹⁰ The goal is for both to reclaim the self that has been stolen by the oppressor. However, from slavery to the emergence of the Black Power movement in the 1960s, consciousness development for Blacks was grounded in an awareness of evangelical Christian principles of duty, destiny, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation that were denied by *de jure* and *de facto* racial oppression and segregation.¹⁹¹ For women such as Stewart and Burroughs, the issue of

¹⁹⁰ Freire has a more sophisticated philosophy in the development of consciousness. Again, his three stages are: (1) naïve transitive consciousness, (2) semi-intransitive consciousness, and (3) critical consciousness. This consciousness development is inextricably connected to the ethic of the person in light of the limiting conditions they face that are, however, not determined. The limiting conditions can be changed as each person chooses to respond to what Freire calls the limit-situations. The Black Church spoke of consciousness development earlier on from more of a theological perspective. The issue of racial, cultural pride did not become integrated until critiques launched at the Black Church by the Black Power Movement. See Gayraud Wilmore, *Pragmatic Spirituality: The Christian Faith Through an Africentric Lens* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), chapter 12 for a thorough history and discussion on how the Black Power movement challenged the Black Church to respond to the Black crisis in unprecedented ways.

¹⁹¹ See Timothy L. Smith, "Slavery and Theology: The Emergence of Black Christian Consciousness in Nineteenth Century America," *Church History* 41, no. 4 (1972): 497-512. Smith's article is consistent with Anderson's claim concerning the evangelical influence on the enslaved and later emancipated African's conceptual understanding of such terms as "freedom," "resistance," and

gender was included as well. Nevertheless, the predominantly nonreligious emergence of Black Power—the Nation of Islam is a religious exception—introduced the concept of racial pride and consciousness which was not concerned with being consistent with Black Christian evangelical notions of selfhood. Hence, Black churches and Black clergy were challenged to rethink how to be present to the Black community and congregants who were embracing new notions of selfhood that did not originate in the Black Church.¹⁹²

The one thing that the Black Church can learn from Freire is his praxis orientation. Engaged with multiple contexts, communities, cultures, and texts, Freire is an exemplar of transcending one's particular location in order to change and be changed by the world that exists outside of oneself. Refusing to be caught up in merely the doing—which he refers to as activism, or the thinking—which he refers to as verbalism—Freire embodies the need for both action and reflection in the protracted struggle for human freedom.

The process of interacting in and with numerous and diverse communities does not suggest that the Black Church has to yield itself to every theory, theology, and doctrine it encounters. On the contrary, in order to engage different communities from one's theological location, one must be knowledgeable about and affirmed in the wells from which one drinks while simultaneously possessing the courage and humility to be challenged. This suggests that action-reflection needs to become a *modus operandi* of the Black Church that can assist in the development of fresh, insightful theological and

“liberation.” These concepts were not grounded in an ontological Blackness as Black liberation theology claims.

¹⁹² See Gayraud Wilmore, *Pragmatic Spirituality*, chapter 14 for narratives on how African American clergy struggled with providing pastoral care to angry African American Christian youth in the wake of the urban crisis. In addition, Wilmore notes the mutual transformation that occurred between clergy and congregant as both attempted to make meaning of the undeniable cry for Black freedom.

practical theological models that are actually grounded in African American religious experience. For far too long, the Black Church has been active in the struggle for racial justice, but has not taken the time to reflect on its practice and its purpose. Being bound to the theological and democratic frameworks of its oppressor, the Black Church has not been able to discern how this has hindered practice, theory and theology building, and the integration of the two in hopes of racial justice and reconciliation in the ministry of the Black Church.

A major step in incorporating Freire's form of praxis would be for Black churches to consider the conversations that need to take place within congregations which can inform the kinds of conversations that can be honestly engaged with those who are not part of the Black Church. This way, the Black churches will be determining how and when to enter various social conversations based on the needs of its congregation and the particular community it is ministering to. Furthermore, this approach would help to facilitate the kinds of educational, homiletic, and worship experiences that would need to occur in the life of the church in order to provide ongoing training in leadership and spiritual formation.

To incorporate Freire's notion of praxis is one thing, but to reinvent Freire in a Black church context is extremely difficult for the following two reasons. First, Freire is limited on discussing religious experience and theology in his pedagogy. His discussion includes his critique of the religious in Brazil who accept their present situation as ordained by God with a magical, mythical, and naive interpretation of the world.¹⁹³ In educating towards freedom, the religious must move beyond their supernatural understanding of the world to one that is grounded in the existential, material world.

¹⁹³ See Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope*, 48; and *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 18.

Freire does not demonstrate how both the physical and metaphysical worlds can be integrated to provide a critical perspective on the world. Although his intellectual effort displayed in his article on how the church can become more prophetic and radical, it is void of praxis. Freire does not test his critique of the church in context and therefore it lacks credibility. Moreover, Elias argues that Freire's three types of churches is the transferal of his level of consciousness with the traditional, modern, and prophetic corresponding to the naïve, semi-transitive, and critical consciousness, respectively.¹⁹⁴ Again, Freire is still operating from a predominantly materialist perspective even though he is a Christian and is able to employ Christian religious language and symbols. Therefore, in appropriating Freire, the Black Church would have to 1) forsake its religious experience and theology when articulating a prophetic response, 2) discover a way to integrate the two in ways that honors Freire's democratic, humanist spirit and the Black Church's religious experience and identity, or 3) test the credibility of Freire's analysis of the church in practice. In other words, tools and instruments would need to be developed to assess if a particular congregation is traditional, modern, or prophetic, and then after the evaluation there would need to be the design and implementation of religious pedagogy to either affirm one's prophetic, empowering witness or to work towards it.

Second, race, class, and gender issues have been part of the Black Church's agenda with race as the dominant category of critique. However, although Freire moved from his sole analysis of class to include issues of race and gender, class nevertheless is the dominant ideology that prevails in his analysis.¹⁹⁵ It would have been nice to see

¹⁹⁴ Elias, 144.

¹⁹⁵ See Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 68, 70, 73; and Mayo, *Liberating Praxis*, 7 and chap. 4.

Freire demonstrate more often how the inclusion of additional lenses influenced his practice, and the different experiences of empowerment that occurred when one category of analysis was not properly employed versus when all three were functioning in a given context. In addition, what is required of the educator to negotiate one or more areas of social, cultural difference? In this instance, for the Black Church to reinvent Freire, class would have to become a dominant mode of analysis or the Black Church could pick up where Freire left off concerning the roles that race, sex, and class play in the educational process towards empowerment.¹⁹⁶ These issues raised concerning appropriating Freire are addressed in chapter 4 where I speak to the empowering pedagogy that was developed and implemented in a local Black evangelical congregation.

¹⁹⁶ I realize that there are other forms of discrimination and oppression that occur in many Black churches and society, but they are beyond the purview of this study which focuses on issues of race, sex, and class.

CHAPTER 3

DU BOIS' DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS IN BLACK LIFE AND LITERATURE: THE PARADOX OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowering a people, a nation, and a world has been a primary occupation of both Freire and the Black Church. Starting from their own particular context, each has endeavored to address issues of oppression and the negation of humanity through their respective educational philosophical or religious/theological systems and practices. The severe psychological, physiological, and spiritual impact of oppression and subjugation alienates the oppressed human from self, other, world and God. Consequently, many constantly struggle to reclaim a self in a world that renders them invisible and undesirable.

W. E. B. Du Bois, a sociologist, historian, Pan-Africanist, and socialist, captures the complexity, and paradoxes of living and being one of the oppressed in his classic, *The Souls of Black Folk*.¹ Critically examining the problem of the color line in the U.S. at the beginning of the 20th Century, Du Bois unveils Black life in a White dominated America. With his deep desire to be both African and American instead of either one or the other, Du Bois articulates the experiences and stories of those who live “behind the veil.”² As one who lived “behind the veil,” Du Bois provides a personal yet social scientific account of Black life. From this location as a social scientific researcher of African descent, Du Bois enables us to see from another angle the psychological and sociological death-blows of oppression. In many ways, he is consistent with the analysis of Freire, and in others

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), first published 1903.

² Du Bois frequently refers to life “behind the veil” to indicate the lack of freedom African Americans experience because they are constantly under the gaze of the White dominant society.

ways he is different because he provides a theoretical foundation that exposes the diverse responses to life “behind the veil.”³ In regards to the Black Church, Du Bois further develops the paradoxical social experience of African American evangelicals as documented in the previous chapter even though he does not give attention to the religious, theological paradoxical experience. Although he is lauded as a sociologist of religion today, Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* and *The Negro Church* does not explore religious and theological themes of African American evangelical Christianity.⁴

Du Bois’ double-consciousness theory constitutes the first section of this chapter. Included in this section is a brief discussion of social scientific research on the religious experience of African Americans to demonstrate the empowering role religion has played in the life of many African Americans. The second and final section is a description and critique of James Fowler’s Conjunctive Faith, Stage 5, in his highly acclaimed *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* in light of the African American religious experience in particular, and the African American experience in general. Unlike Du Bois, Fowler does discuss religion and psychosocial experience in more detail. Therefore, Fowler’s model is put in conversation with the Black Church’s experience and Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness.

³ Some may argue that Freire’s three levels of consciousness represent diverse responses to oppression. On one hand he does. Freire’s paradigm is developmental, and in this sense, he demonstrates that each level of critical consciousness or the lack thereof constitutes a particular response in history. However, on the other hand, he is limited in the kinds of redemptive responses that can occur. It is either his norm, critical consciousness, or the other two levels as movement from Object, being acted upon, to Subject, acting on and with the world. The other two levels are a movement towards becoming an authentic self (Subject) and not expressions of one in and of itself. Unlike Freire, Du Bois presents a model or framework where the action of the oppressed African American is redemptive though not ideal. Du Bois demonstrates the complexity of moral agency for oppressed African Americans which underscores the dialectical tension of double-consciousness in mind, body, and society that Freire tends to overlook in his Latin American context. The major difference is that Du Bois assumes that the Black self is conscious of the double-consciousness, and therefore, she/he responds accordingly for her/his particular desired end.

⁴ See Phil Zuckerman, “The Sociology of Religion of W. E. B. Du Bois,” *Sociology of Religion* 63, no. 2 (2002): 239-53; and Phil Zuckerman, Sandra L. Barnes, and Daniel Cady, introduction to *The Negro Church*, ed. W. E. B. Du Bois (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003), vii.

Du Bois' Double Consciousness

At the beginning of the 20th century, Du Bois provides a rich, provocative rendering of the social, spiritual, and psychological experience of U.S. slave descendants of African origin.⁵ He poignantly asserts,

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.⁶

Several major themes or issues emerge from Du Bois' profound insight. First, although he describes the difficult, inhumane plight of Negroes, he still places Negroes within the context of civilized humanity. Second, he highlights the disadvantaged circumstances that the Negro is born with and into, which suggests that the main problem lies outside of the Negro people. Third, when he elucidates the nature of the double-consciousness, he celebrates yet mourns the existential reality of having to see the world solely through the eyes of another. This double-consciousness is not dismissed or denied, but acknowledged for what it is—a less than true self, but a self nevertheless. Finally, his emphasis on the “second sight” as a gift that which the Negro is born with is both negative and positive. This additional sight or consciousness is seen as both an oddity, yet a potentially redemptive gift if the two sights are able to be integrated or reconciled.

⁵ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

Du Bois' ethical norm of integration is the development of the self that allows for the merger of the two without the loss of either one.⁷ The Africanizing of America or the bleaching of the Black soul are not viable options because both the African and Euro-American have something to contribute to humanity according to Du Bois.⁸ This approach could be attributed to multiple reasons including his: 1) French, Dutch, and African ancestry, 2) belief in the power of science, reason and knowledge to dispel the myths that Euro-Americans had of Africans, and 3) experience in Germany where he was not viewed through the gaze of the White dominant society as a Black American foreign student at Berlin.⁹ Yet, in his desire to integrate and affirm the best that both Africa and America has to offer, Du Bois was caught in a conundrum because deep down within his soul he knew that the integration was costly. As he celebrated and affirmed German pride and nationalism, he raised the following provocative questions. "I began to feel that dichotomy which all my life has characterized my thought: how far can love for my oppressed race accord with love for the oppressing country? And when these loyalties diverge, where shall my soul find refuge?"¹⁰ Learning to love both race and country, nevertheless, Du Bois is keenly aware of the unshakeable tension and contradiction of such deep affection and admiration. In this heart wrenching psychological, social, and emotional space, Du Bois somehow finds the courage to engage in an intellectual/activist endeavor to find rest for his soul and others of the Black race.

⁷ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See Stanley Crouch and Playthell Benjamin, *Reconsidering "The Souls of Black Folk": Thoughts on the Groundbreaking Classic Work of W. E. B. Du Bois* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2002), 35-36, 64-65.

¹⁰ Du Bois cited in Crouch and Benjamin, 65. The authors do not provide a citation of the original text.

Herein lies the paradox of empowerment for African Americans. On one hand, if the Negro chooses to function in and with the world only through the eyes of her/his oppressor, then the Negro would be choosing to live and survive in terms of a prescribed, predetermined status that does not disrupt or interrupt the status quo. For many African Americans, this way of being does not guarantee true participation in history as authentic selves or subjects, but it does allow for survival—an extended life of learning how to function well behind the veil. Then, on the other hand, if the African American chooses to be more of a subject and less of an object in American society, she/he becomes participants in the culture but at the expense of being alienated from the masses of African Americans who remain on the fringes, and tokenized by the Euro-American culture who often maintain an attitude of superiority. Both ethical responses require an inordinate amount of energy and strength. Moreover, the cognitive and emotional acumen are often overlooked on Western standardized tests and theories of intellectual, psychological, and moral development.

In examining Du Bois's double-consciousness, a typology of moral agency—a philosophical, ethical understanding of the human who is autonomous and able to make decisions without coercion or restraints—can be generated which constitutes the diversity of ethical response among an oppressed people. The classical understanding of moral agency excludes enslaved African Americans from being moral agents because as property or slaves, they were not free to make their own decisions. However, Katie G. Cannon, a Womanist ethicist asserts, “The cherished ethical ideas predicated upon the existence of freedom and a wide range of choices proved null and void in situations of

oppression.”¹¹ Cannon further claims, “The real-lived texture of Black life requires moral agency that may run contrary to the ethical boundaries of mainline Protestantism.”¹² Cannon’s critique of classical notions of moral agency as they relate to the lived experience of African Americans creates space for the exploration of moral agency that transcends the definition coined by European, elite males. Hence, Du Bois’ double-consciousness serves as a foray to the examination of moral agency of an oppressed people.

In Du Bois’ definition of double-consciousness, there are at least four types of moral agents that emerge. They are: 1) the hypocritical moral agent in which the Negro (African American) self is subjugated to the American (white) self, 2) the radical moral agent in which the Negro (African American) self is disconnected from the American (white) self, 3) the integrationalist moral agent in which the two selves co-exist without the Negro (African American) self being disenfranchised and perpetually disparaged, and 4) the reconciling moral agent in which the two selves are healing from the brokenness and fragmentation in ways that redefine Blackness and Whiteness.¹³

¹¹ Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series, no. 60 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 2.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Du Bois calls the first type a hypocrite and the second type a radical. I think more contemporary terms of assimilationist/accommodationist and black nationalist are synonymous with his earlier terminology. Type three flows from the unreconciled selves because I consider this to be the goal of Du Bois in order to become a truer self. Hence, I think Du Bois argues implicitly that all Negroes or African Americans have this double-consciousness whether they realize it or not. But, for Du Bois, the goal is to integrate instead of assimilate or become an independent, separatist black self. Although he eventually moved to Africa, I do not think this was his intention during the writing of *Souls of Black Folk*. Finally, the fourth type is my theological ethical vision of the reconciled selves that Du Bois believes to be impossible. The main difference between Du Bois’ integrationist moral agent, and my proposal of a reconciling moral agent is the incorporation of God-talk or theology. Du Bois’ three types are grounded in a humanist understanding of moral agency that are silent on the role God plays in the process of engendering empowerment of the oppressed. A major similarity that should be raised is that Du Bois and I seek to resolve the problem of the color line. Although our approaches are different because he thinks that at the heart of the problem is ignorance on the part of Whites, I think the problem of the color line is more complex than a matter of the head. Granted, I am arguing a century after the publication of the book which

According to Du Bois, the hypocritical compromise is manifested through deception, flattery, cajoling, and lying.¹⁴ Moreover, he notes,

The young Negro of the South who would succeed cannot be frank and outspoken, honest and self-assertive, but rather he is daily tempted to be silent and wary, politic and sly; he must flatter and be pleasant, endure petty insults with a smile, shut his eyes to wrong; in too many cases he sees positive personal advantage in deception and lying. His real thoughts, his real aspirations, must be guarded in whispers; he must not criticize, he must not complain. With this sacrifice there is an economic opening, and perhaps peace and some prosperity. Without this there is riot, migration, or crime.¹⁵

In this description of the hypocritical moral agent, Du Bois elaborates on both the constraints and the freedom. He presents the moral agent within the context of success or failure. For the hypocritical moral agent, success comes at the expense of being frank, outspoken, honest, and self-assertion. Hence, what White America may value as moral integrity puts African American hypocritical moral agents at a disadvantage due to the two selves. In the double-consciousness of the hypocritical moral agent, the White self reigns in ways that suppresses and oppresses the African American self. This double-conscious self knows that any sign of confidence, initiative, and self-assertion would be met with further disdain and unfavorable consequences, because the African American self is not supposed to act this way, according to the White self. However, the African American self is not acting out in its true character or nature. Somehow, somehow, aspirations and ambitions that differ from the White conscious are tucked away as to not be discovered by the white self. Nevertheless, these aspirations are never really acted upon because they would lead to failure instead of success.

occurred during modernity—a time when intellect, knowledge, and reasoning were esteemed as humanity's salvation from ignorance and irrational ways of thinking and acting in the world.

¹⁴ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 143-44.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

The second type of moral agent is coined radical by Du Bois. The radical moral agent is the antithesis of the hypocritical moral agent. What is apparent about the radical is that

Driven from his birthright in the South by a situation at which every fibre of his more outspoken and assertive nature revolts, he finds himself in a land where he can scarcely earn a decent living amid the harsh competition and the color discrimination. At the same time, through schools and periodicals, discussions and lectures, he is intellectually quickened and awakened. The soul, long pent up and dwarfed, suddenly expands in new-found freedom. What wonder that every tendency is to excess,-- radical complaint, radical remedies, bitter denunciation or angry silence. Some sink, some rise. The criminal and the sensualist leave the church for the gambling-hell and the brothel, and fill the slums of Chicago and Baltimore; the better classes segregate themselves from the group-life of both white and black, and form an aristocracy, cultured but pessimistic, whose bitter criticism stings while it points out no way of escape. They despise the submission and subserviency of the Southern Negroes, but offer no other means by which a poor and oppressed minority can exist side by side with its masters. Feeling deeply and keenly the tendencies and opportunities of the age in which they live, their souls are bitter at the fate which drops the Veil between; and the very fact that this bitterness is natural and justifiable only serves to intensify it and make it more maddening.¹⁶

There are three aspects of the African American radical moral agent that I want to raise.

First, although this self is more assertive, she/he is not necessarily successful. Not

because of the self's lack of ingenuity or desire to perform, but because of the difficulty in transcending the color line. This self knows that it has to work twice as hard than its

White counterpart in order to be considered worthy to enter through the "door of opportunity." Second, although education opens the radical self up to a whole new

world, this is far from a blissful state. No longer is the self innocent of the structures and systems that hold the self captive. No longer is the self content with the way things are.

Consequently, in the wake of this painful illumination, the deep cry from her/his African American souls is freedom. Those who manage to cope find ways to pursue and embody

¹⁶ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 144-45.

freedom. Unfortunately, many end up dead because the White structure refuses to accept their humanity. Then, those who do not cope or find it extremely difficult to function search out ways to dull the pain. Third, those who have some degree of financial wealth relocate, but are nevertheless embittered and enraged. In their double segregation (the segregation imposed by the veil or color line and the self-chosen segregation), they find no solace or replenishment of the souls.

Concerning the integrationalist African American moral agent, Du Bois speaks of this self as more of an impossible ideal. Nevertheless, he envisages the hope one day for the Negro race when he states,

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife (the double-consciousness),--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that the Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.¹⁷

One thing that rings clear in this description is that the retention and integration of both selves benefits both the African American self and the world. One without the other would be a disservice to humanity, according to Du Bois. Consequently, he points the way to engaging and embracing difference in ways that celebrate and affirm humanity. Then, on the other hand, he crystallizes the insidious, corrupt, and sinful consequences of the subjugation of humans by other so-called humans. To be cursed, spit upon, despised, and rejected for attempting to be who one is can render one helpless and powerless.

The African American integrationalist can only do so much. No matter how hard they try to integrate both selves, many powerful and less powerful white people still

¹⁷ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

maintain their disdain towards African Americans and therefore, inequality and inhumane behaviors persist. The African American moral agent must not, and cannot bear this burden alone. Who or what else is responsible and can contribute to the reality of the African American integrationalist moral agent?

Although DuBois does not make this direct connection, the integrationalist African American moral agent needs American institutions to respond in ways that concretely, intentionally, and indefinitely work to redress a history of oppression and subjugation. However, he does give an extensive account of the successes and failures of the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction to uplift a race that had been systematically disenfranchised.¹⁸ He clearly demonstrates the efforts of the U.S. government through the start of associations and commissions in order to address a legacy of slavocracy.¹⁹ He comments on his perception of the national crisis as one of labor, and the mutual responsibility of the new Negro freedmen, and federal and state governments in his analysis.²⁰ DuBois asserts in this analysis, "Masses of Negroes stood idle, or, if they worked spasmodically, were never sure of pay; and if perchance they received pay, squandered the new thing thoughtlessly."²¹ Euro-Americans could not fathom the idea of co-existing with free African Americans, and therefore, all efforts were doomed before they started, according to Du Bois.²² In the end, he argues that the Freedmen's Bureau died before its time, but the nation must draw from the legacy of such an institution in order to engage the growing needs among its newly freed inhabitants.²³

¹⁸ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, chap. 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

²³ *Ibid.*, 28.

Hence, Du Bois does not exonerate the role of the government in the necessity to administer justice for all people living on American soil.²⁴

Du Bois' sound critical and analytical description of the problem of the color line suggests that it will take a power, being, or force beyond humanity in order to rectify this deep-seated, entrenched problem. Or, even if it is not completely rectifiable in history, how does an African American moral agent continue to have hope in a country and a world that sees the African American self as a problem? What sustains, empowers, and enlivens many African American moral agents in the midst of such dire, persistent circumstances? Is there another alternative to Du Bois' three African American moral agents?

The reconciling African American moral agent is what I propose as an alternative to Du Bois' ethical typology for African Americans because this fourth type accounts for the religious experience of African Americans. Reconciliation is steeped within the Black Christian tradition of the parenthood of God and kinship of humanity. Throughout ante-bellum and post-bellum America, many African American Christians refused to acquiesce to second-class status for they felt it was antithetical to their understanding of God and Christianity. In their desire to fulfill democracy and equality on U.S. territory, their theology and faith provided the foundation for the deconstruction of power in America, resistance to the negation of their humanity, and hope for a more just America.

As clearly demonstrated in the previous chapter, many enslaved Africans who were brought to and born on American soil questioned the harsh reality of slavery

²⁴ Du Bois, 28-29. On these pages Du Bois provides a sad description of the state of free yet enslaved African Americans after two centuries of slavery and ten years of Reconstruction efforts. Nevertheless, he argues for the need of the resurrection of such an institution as the Freedmen's Bureau in order to address the glaring needs of those African Americans who were being taxed without representation.

because of the way it opposed and negated life instead of supporting and celebrating life. Furthermore, God was understood not as one who condones or who is neutral in such an oppressive system, but one who is in favor of the freedom of the black oppressed. Martin notes, “The Christian enslaved refused to believe chattel slavery or racial discrimination consistent with the will of God.”²⁵ In this vein, even though the system of slavery existed, it was not something that the enslaved blacks embraced as if God either ordained it or was unmoved by it. There were those who anticipated God’s deliverance from oppression and bondage so that they could be God’s instruments or agents of change in the world.²⁶ According to Martin, “God had employed the black church to spread a casteless Christianity, oppose enslavement, push for civic freedoms, and give African Americans opportunities to develop leadership.”²⁷ Although slavery was an existential reality to be opposed, God’s providential plan for black people would not be thwarted. In this theology, God seeks to transform structures and systems that are in opposition to God’s will in history, and God chooses and calls on human instruments to respond to God’s transformational, redemptive, and reconciling activity in the world.

Smith notes the arduous thinking that was necessary during the ante-bellum period while the enslaved Africans accepted a Gospel that allowed for spiritual freedom without social freedom.²⁸ Smith further exclaims, “Picking their way through the maze of contradictions between the teaching and the practice of those who oppressed them, the African Christians emerged with a deep sense of the paradox and mystery of God’s

²⁵ Sandy Dwayne Martin, “Providence and the Black Christian Consensus,” in *The Courage to Hope: From Black Suffering to Human Redemption*, ed. Quinton Hosford Dixie and Cornel West (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 50.

²⁶ Ibid., 41.

²⁷ Ibid., 48.

²⁸ Timothy L. Smith, 498.

dealings with men.”²⁹ Searching for meaning of their existential reality, the enslaved Africans developed a theology of hope to withstand and find solace in a faith that was said to deliver freedom on one hand, and maintain bondage on the other. Unlike their White Christian sisters and brothers, African American Christians were challenged to deal with racial and religious paradoxes that required creative theological, ethical responses.

One such creative response found in U.S. slave theology is the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. This teaching challenged the subjugating, hegemonic system of slavocracy and beyond. As people who are created in the image of God, the enslaved and free blacks were conscious of their human worth to God.³⁰ For example, “Creation in God’s image meant that every person is entitled to be free. Denial of this basic right is in direct conflict with the biblical view of creation and God’s relationship to humanity.”³¹ This conviction of U.S. slave theologians illuminates their resistance of and opposition to human constructs that dismissed or belittled their human dignity. Moreover, it possibly imbued within them a deepening of the Christian love ethic for their White sisters and brothers because as oppressors of Black humans, White people were not free either. Consequently, as this particular theological underpinning inspired enslaved Black Christians to respond to the atrocities of slavery and racism, they were seeking freedom not only for themselves, but also for their oppressors. This highlights their theological ethic of reconciliation.

Although reconciliation and hope were integral parts of the African Christian’s theology, it was not always easy to discern how to best to work towards reconciliation

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Martin, 48-49. See also Dale P. Andrews, 40-42, 44-47.

³¹ Andrews, 41.

and justice. According to Andrews, in the religious conversion experience, the Christian black slave faced a peculiar dilemma.³² The dilemma was centered on once the enslaved person became spiritually free from sin and depravity, what were they to do about their relationship to their white masters and the institution of slavery. In essence, although the enslaved had experienced spiritual freedom, social, political, and economic freedom were denied both before and after Emancipation.³³ Nevertheless, the new enslaved converts wondered whether to confront the evil of racism by enduring or surviving social, political, and economic bondage until God brings in the new order, or through escape or revolution.³⁴

The eschatological hope of the black converts further affirms their belief in God's activity in the world. For them, God was bringing a new social order even though it was not immediately manifested in its totality. What was manifested already was a sense that their social conditions were not consistent with their supposedly spiritual, ontological freedom. What was yet to come was the reconciliation between the spiritual self and social self, Black and White which African Christians believed to be part and parcel of the Christian message that was hopefully on the horizon.

For African American Christians before and after slavery, justice was something that was being negated by social systems that violated their humanity and ability to do their Christian duty.³⁵ They were convinced that slavery did not pardon them from what God's righteous law and order demanded.³⁶ Through internalizing the Biblical stories of

³² Andrews, 46.

³³ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 4-29.

³⁴ Andrews, 46. See also Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, chaps. 2 and 3, where he discusses various insurrectionists such as Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vessey, and Nat Turner, African Christians who believed that a revolution was in order.

³⁵ Timothy L. Smith, 505-06.

³⁶ Ibid.

Jews' deliverance from Egypt and the Babylonian captivity, the deliverance of Daniel, and his three comrades who did not bow down to the earthly King as God's promise of deliverance to the oppressed, the early African American Christians sought to obey the God of Christianity even in their despised social condition.³⁷ In doing so, they escaped the judgment of God, and embodied a model of forgiveness, love, and reconciliation that was foreign to many White Christians.³⁸ The early African American Christians stood on the conviction that in God's own time and in God's own way, justice on earth for all of God's people would prevail someday.

The expectation of a new, different social order was not so much grounded in what God brings to humanity, but in what was already given to the world through Jesus that should be affirmed and lived out on earth.³⁹ Whether it was an ethic of violent resistance and revolution like Prosser, Vessey, and Turner, or engaged resistance through education, industrialization and public action like Stewart, Burroughs, and Payne, or non-resistance because vengeance belongs to God, or the nonviolent direct action resistance of King, Black Christians have employed multiple ethics of resistance which they believed would help usher in justice here on earth. In forgiving their oppressors, Black Christians found the "means to resist inwardly injustices they could neither

³⁷ Timothy L. Smith, 502-03.

³⁸ Ibid., 502.

³⁹ In my reading of Timothy L. Smith and Anderson, I am convinced that the early African American Christians did not have an eschatology of what God is bringing to humanity. Instead of looking forward to God, they looked back to the God in the Old Testament stories and in the person of Jesus to construct a theology of hope for the present and future. In their present existential situation, they had a responsibility or duty to respond to what God had already done. Hence, once they were free to serve God as they should, the elusive quest for justice could be embodied in their freed state instead of their state of bondage. The lack of a clear eschatology is consistent with many African American Christian evangelical churches today. There is a sense that Jesus is coming back to receive his own in the Second Advent, but beyond this, there is not much theological reflection given to what is yet to be fulfilled in God's creation. The already/not yet is one dialectical tension that lies dormant in many Black churches.

condone nor for the moment curb.”⁴⁰ Even in their prayer, praise and worship services, justice was taken shape and form. “The ecstasy of such moments,” Smith argues, “represented not so much a flight from reality as a celebration of their discovery of the strength with which to face it.”⁴¹ God was their strength and waymaker as they championed the cause of the divine who had called them to both spiritual and social freedom, and thereby spiritual and social justice.

This rich theological ethical history of African American experience and belief informs my continued understanding and experience of God’s reconciling, redemptive, and empowering activity in the world. However, where I depart from my Black Christian religious heritage is on two levels. First, my engaged resistance with pacifist tendencies is not being performed to prove my self worth to the dominant culture or be approved by the dominant culture. Rather, it comes more from what Thurman’s grandmother passed on to him, and that is, as a child of God, I am already approved and affirmed by the one who has called me into being. Knowing and abiding by this deep truth, nothing else really matters. Second, I believe that God is bringing something to us that has not already been revealed and fulfilled. Though I do not know the end, I must discern God’s reconciling, redemptive activity in history as I live into and out of my Christian faith. In discerning different epochs and moments in history, God’s sovereignty is not left untouched, but is continually called into question so that I can make meaning of the existential moment. There are times, like my Black spiritual ancestors, where I must surrender to the mystery of God and trust that what is not yet known will not thwart God’s ultimate purpose for humanity of reconciliation and redemption. This is done in

⁴⁰ Timothy L. Smith, 500.

⁴¹ Ibid., 503.

order for me not to be overwhelmed by the present so that I can be free to continue to struggle for justice. Other times I receive an answer that dulls the pain and engenders hope. Then, in other moments, I am able to experience God's love and providence which affirms and reaffirms my belief in God.

In the ways that I am part of the Black Christian tradition, yet seeking to expand it, my theological ethical vision of the reconciling African American moral agent is described. As a reconciling moral agent, I seek to transform structures, institutions, and systems that attempt to prohibit and diminish the self's theological and philosophical understanding as human who is created in the image of God. Cognizant of the various relationships that exist that attempt to negate life and humanization, the African American reconciling moral agent negotiates and navigates her way through the web of relationships knowing her inherent worth to God as human. As negotiator and navigator, she takes account of various particular relationships (intrapsychic, interpersonal, interracial, intercultural, and institutional) and attempt to discern how the relationships help to affirm her human worth. For those relationships that discount her being, she must discern how God is acting for her to be in right relationship with them, both internally and externally. There are times when she may have to separate like the African American radical moral agent because the people and/or institutions involved in the relationship are not ready to affirm her worth. While she may not be in right relationship with the various people and institutions externally, internally, she has done what was necessary to maintain hope for the possibility of reentering the relationships at a time when the people and institutions have matured and are ready to affirm her, as does God. The separation can take place physically, emotionally, or both physically and

emotionally. Separation does not imply that transformation is being thwarted; what is important to note is that the reconciler knows that one cannot pour new wine into old wineskins. Wisdom must prevail, and in the midst of renewal, self-care or right relationship with self must be a priority.

As the reconciler discerns how to be in right relationships, she also is confronted with the role of resistance in order to be in right relationships. One form of resistance has to do with the oppressive system or person. The other form of resistance has to do with the negative consequences of the oppressive system, institution or person such as hate, despair, and doubt. Du Bois names hate, despair, and doubt as three temptations that beleaguer the African American reconciler moral agent.⁴² Like the integrationalist, the reconciler is too surrounded by such intense temptations. If these temptations are not resisted then the possible outcomes are apathy, bitterness, uncontrollable rage, hopelessness, and/or fatalism.

As the reconciler seeks to redefine the relationships that once denied one's humanity, new models are introduced, and seeds of hope are planted. In the area of race relations, new ways of understanding Blackness and Whiteness can emerge. This new understanding and way of being could be based on Blackness and Whiteness as part of God's colorful, created humanity instead of a faulty scientific biology and an unjust system of privilege and power. Moreover, the new ways of being in right relationship with White people and Whiteness challenge the continuing legacy of race and racism in the subtle and not so subtle nature of its present complex existence.

The African American reconciling moral agent is a shalom moral agent. Shalom is a Hebrew word that "conveys the image of wholeness, unity, and harmony—something

⁴² Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 152.

that is complete and sound.”⁴³ Moreover, shalom is essentially a relational concept that also conveys the idea of health, prosperity and fulfillment.⁴⁴ In the reconciler’s various relationships, she is seeking to experience wholeness, unity, harmony, health, prosperity, and fulfillment even though she finds herself oftentimes in the midst of oppressive, contentious, and strife-ridden interpersonal and institutional relationships. She has the power to choose how she will be in the relationships so that she can be affirmed. In addition, while God may or may not be on the side of the oppressed, she can stand on more solid ground that God is on the side of right, just, and humane relationships. In this rests her eschatological hope and inspiration as she negotiates and navigates her relationships, knowing that God values her, and her sisters and brothers as well.

The theological ethic of forgiveness and reconciliation that was prominent among 19th and 20th century African American Christians is and was frowned upon by certain Black theologians, Black Nationalists, and Black Marxists/Socialists because it was considered to be too otherworldly, apolitical, and an opiate of the people. However, contemporary social scientific research on Afro-American Christianity suggests otherwise. For example, Fredrick Harris argues that the Black Church has played an empowering role in the lives of African American Christians because the Church has enabled them to see that they can influence the political process through action.⁴⁵ Employing a method that moves beyond the traditional dichotomy of inspiration versus opiate for political activity, Harris’ work explores the multidimensionality of Afro-

⁴³ Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), s. v. “peace.”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Fredrick C. Harris, 34.

Christianity by examining social movements, civil society, and cultural theory.⁴⁶

Although there are several other political scientists who do research on Afro-Christianity from the either inspiration or opiate paradigm, none of their research supports the claim of the direct correlation between Afro-Christianity and the lack of political activism.⁴⁷ Instead, these researchers document the diversity among African American religiosity including public and otherworldliness and that each one entails some aspect of political involvement and empowerment such as integrationist and separatist, respectively. Hence, this body of social scientific research on Afro-Christianity reveals that religion is an empowering variable, but towards different ends.

The Double-Consciousness of Black Folks and Fowler's Stage of Conjunctive Faith

Du Bois' rich description of the existential double-conscious experience of African Americans affirms the indefatigable yet constantly challenged strength of Black folks in a White dominated society. Even in the midst of the evil perpetrated against him and other Black folks by the White oppressor, Du Bois is able to distinguish the good from the bad within Whiteness. This suggests that Du Bois is able to function with contradictions and tensions in order to achieve wholeness among both the self and the other. In other words, as Du Bois experiences the denial of citizenship and degradation, he understands that there are other characteristics that denote Whiteness that can be

⁴⁶ Fredrick C. Harris, 7.

⁴⁷ See Allison Calhoun-Brown, "While Marching to Zion: Otherworldliness and Racial Empowerment in the Black Community," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 3 (1998): 427-39; and "What a Fellowship: Civil Society, African American Churches, and Public Life," in *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America*, ed. R. Drew Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 39-57; Jeffrey S. Levin, Robert Joseph Taylor, and Linda M. Chatters, "A Multidimensional Religious Involvement for African Americans," *Sociological Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1995): 157-73; Darren E. Sherkat and Christopher G. Ellison, "The Politics of Black Religious Change: Disaffiliation from Black Mainline Denominations," *Social Forces* 70, no. 2 (December 1991): 432-54; Robert Joseph Taylor, Michael C. Thornton, and Linda M. Chatters, "Black Americans' Perceptions of the Sociohistorical Role of the Church," *Journal of Black Studies* 18, no. 2 (December 1987): 123-38. Clyde Wilcox and Leopoldo Gomez, "Religion, Group Identification, and Politics among American Blacks," *Sociological Analysis* 51, no. 3 (1990): 271-85.

claimed by the double-consciousness of the African American that would allow for the internalization of that which is healthy and restorative instead of that which is unhealthy and unjust. Furthermore, he and others also know that the White stigmas and images of self-negation and death that are constantly inscribed onto the Black mind and body do not constitute Blackness in and of itself. Deep within his being, as he ever feels, perceives, and experiences his twoness, he knows there is something more, something different, that he as a Black self towards wholeness and integration must write into existence. In essence, both Blackness and Whiteness are defined and redefined in the actions of the integrationalist African American moral agent.⁴⁸

Although Du Bois speaks of double-consciousness of Black folks, the stories and experiences of African American women provide a more in-depth examination of double-consciousness coupled with sexism. Based on their study of African American women, Jones and Shorter-Gooden found that in response to relentless oppression, “Black women in our country have had to perfect what we call ‘shifting,’ a sort of subterfuge that African Americans have long practiced to ensure their survival in our society.”⁴⁹ After grounding Black women in the broader African American narrative and experience yet highlighting their unique position in the culture, Jones and Shorter-Gooden assert further,

⁴⁸ Like Freire, Du Bois has an ethical norm as well. It is integration of the two selves that he does not believe to be possible, but yet he nevertheless pursues. However, it must be pointed out that only in the ethical response towards integration is the African American self working towards a more thorough transformation of self and other, and person, community, and society. The African American hypocrite is merely trying to survive as she/he decodes Whiteness in ways that enable her/him to function as a self that neither disrupts the status quo nor adds intentional jeopardy to one’s continued existence here on earth. Then, the African American radical initiates a second separation to reclaim the African self at the expense of denying and dismissing the Euro-American self. While also deeply engaged in decoding Whiteness in the hope of recoding the self, community, and society, the African American radical moral agent is filled with justifiable bitterness and rage, and another layer of isolation that renders her/him ineffective according to Du Bois. It is only the impossible-possibility of the African American integrationalist where the issues of bitterness, rage, and temptation to escape from the twoness emotionally and/or physically are properly addressed.

⁴⁹ Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden, *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 6.

Perhaps more than any other group of Americans, Black women are relentlessly pushed to serve and satisfy others and made to hide their true selves to placate White colleagues, Black men, and other segments of the community. They shift to accommodate differences in class as well as gender and ethnicity. From one moment to the next, they change their outward behavior, attitude, or tone, shifting “White,” then shifting “Black” again, shifting “corporate,” shifting “cool.”⁵⁰

In their rendering of African American women’s experience, the shifting could be read not as a double consciousness, but as a multiple consciousness. This notion of multiple consciousness is found in the work of King who states that issues race, sex, and class are never to be understood as independent variables when examining the existential reality of many Black women such as racism plus sexism plus classism equals the triple oppression of many Black women.⁵¹ Rather, this triple oppression is not additive in nature, but multiple because it (multiple) “refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but to the multiplicative relationships among them as well. In other words, the equivalent formulation is racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism.”⁵² What King drives home is the need for those scholars who do research on power and systems of oppression is to not get caught up in a monistic (i.e., ethnic/nationalist, feminist, or Marxist/socialist) form of analysis but to maintain a more dynamic, integrated approach.⁵³ Otherwise, the voices and experiences of Black women will remain invisible or be relegated to the margins in favor of Black men and White women. While this research is promising, unlike DuBois, scholars have not developed a clear theoretical paradigm to explain the phenomenon of being Black, female, and non-affluent.

⁵⁰ Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 7. The quotation marks are Jones and Shorter-Gooden’s.

⁵¹ Deborah K. King, “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology,” *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 47.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 51.

An elucidating strength of Du Bois' theory is that whether hypocritical, radical, or integrationalist, the African American moral agent exists in a space that is filled with interpreting and being interpreted by the White dominant culture. This dialectical, dialogical existence constitutes Fowler's stage of conjunctive faith.⁵⁴ However, Fowler does not include the African American's psychosocial response as a way of making meaning in a society riddled with racism, White supremacy, and injustice. Hence, in this aspect, Fowler overlooks a significant component in the human development of African Americans. (This issue is given more attention after a description of Fowler's conjunctive faith stage is presented.) Nevertheless, what Fowler wants to draw our attention to is how people at this next to the last stage of his faith development theory are able to do the following. First, they are able to live in and through the tensions that exist in their selves and worlds. In this space, they have been able to reconstitute themselves by moving away from a dichotomous understanding of the world and religious symbols to an intense, reciprocal engagement of self, other, and world. Fowler asserts, "Stage 5's dialogical knowing requires a knower capable of dialogue."⁵⁵ Possessing the capacity to engage something or the known outside of oneself is essential to nurturing and being nurtured in this stage. In celebrating the epistemological potentiality that exists in this stage, Fowler writes, "I speak here of an intimacy in knowing that celebrates, reverences, and attends to the 'wisdom' evolved in things as they are, before seeking to modify, control or order them to fit prior categories."⁵⁶ As both subject and object, the self is knowing as well as being known.

⁵⁴ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 184-85.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 185.

⁵⁶ Ibid. The quotation marks are Fowler's.

Second, people at conjunctive faith are able to seek truth from different perspectives, angles, and dimensions. Truth exists in partial and incomplete ways that requires the active engagement of others through relation to more clearly apprehend truth that transcends the self.⁵⁷ From a religious perspective, the person at stage 5 “knows that the symbols, stories, doctrines and liturgies offered by its own or other traditions are inevitably partial, limited to a particular people’s experience of God and incomplete.”⁵⁸ Although biased on many levels, the quest for deeper, authentic meaning is motivated by the holy ground on which one stands and the holy ground that is yet to be experienced in reconciling with other religious traditions and communities. This speaking of one’s truth yet willing to hear and be transformed by another’s truth is Fowler’s ecumenical vision.⁵⁹

Third, Fowler contends that Stage 5 faith constitutes a conceptualization of religious myths and symbols that do not merely become subject to the knower’s critique, but is also integrated or reconciled with the truth that exists within the symbolic representation.⁶⁰ Cognitive development and symbolical, mythical realities are not left in isolation or exist as separate entities. Rather, in the critique of the religious symbols and myths, new epistemological truths emerge that become surrendered to the symbol and myth in light of the new understanding. In this vein, there is never really a conversion from one’s religious location, but an organic interdependent maturation in the symbols, myths, doctrines, and liturgies that give shape and substance to one’s existence. Consequently, in theory, both self and religious system undergo change in the midst of continuity.

⁵⁷ Fowler, 186.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 187-88.

As previously stated, Fowler's Stage 5 does not provide any additional insight than what has been argued in this chapter concerning the double-consciousness of African Americans in general and their religious experience in particular. However, the psychological, social, ethical, and religious experience of African Americans expose problems within Fowler's psycho-social, cognitive, moral, and religious structural developmental framework.

Fowler argues that conjunctive faith is "unusual before mid-life."⁶¹ However, if he would have had more African Americans in his study he probably would have detected dialectical, dialogical knowing at a much earlier stage in life.⁶² Duncan's study of African American adolescents captures the double-consciousness before adulthood.⁶³ In his study, he documents the three types of voices and constituting of self at play among African American adolescents as subordinate-subjugated, unofficial-underground, and transgressive-profane. Each self is constantly interpreting the White dominant narrative and thereby creating a self that is a never-ending conversation between self and the White, oppressive other. Furthermore, this conversation is intense, complicated, and demonstrates the resourcefulness, skill, and initiative of African Americans. For example, when two brothers, Albert and Louis, in Duncan's study were asked to explain situations in which they feel they could not be themselves, they responded:

Albert: I'll say I'm different around—I'm not racist or nothing—I'm different around other races, you know. Around other non-Blacks, you know. . . I'm myself when I'm around, like . . .

⁶¹ Fowler, 198.

⁶² Out of 359 participants, 8 were Black and 351 were White. See page 316 where Fowler provides a breakdown of participants by age, sex, race, and religious orientation.

⁶³ Garrett A. Duncan, "The Play of Voices: Black Adolescents Constituting the Self and Morality," in *Race-ing Moral Formation: African American Perspectives on Care and Justice*, ed. Vanessa Siddle Walker and John R. Snarey (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004), 38-54.

Louis: Blacks?

Albert: Blacks, yeah [laughter]. Whites, you know, try to stereotype, you know, most of the time. I try to make it so they won't think that—we are not all bad. Some of us are pretty good.

Garrett: So, does this include when you're at school? When you're in the store?

Albert: The store, mainly, yes. You try to be more intelligent so they don't think you're a stupid nigger.

Louis: Like you don't walk how you usually walk when you with somebody else.

Albert: And you talk more intelligent, don't just say half the word, say the whole word, you know.⁶⁴

This short piece can be interpreted and analyzed from multiple perspectives. What is important to note is that both Albert and Louis negotiate multiple dialectical tensions that include race (Blackness and Whiteness), body and space (the gait of the African American male that is often perceived as threatening and/or inappropriate in White society), and language (Ebonics and English) that informs their being and becoming Black.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Duncan, 45.

⁶⁵ Although Albert credits English as being a more sophisticated, intelligent linguistic form than what I term as Ebonics, there is sufficient research on Ebonics that indicates its difference from English, and not its bastardization of English. See Ernie Smith and Karen Crozier, "Ebonics Is Not Black English," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 109-16; Karen Crozier, "Instructional Programs Designed to Teach Standard English to African American Elementary Students" (M.A. thesis, California State University, Fresno, 1996); J. David Ramirez, Terrence G. Wiley, Gerda de Klerk, and Enid Lee, eds., *Ebonics in the Urban Education Debate* (Long Beach, CA: Center for Language Minority Education and Research, 2000); Joyce L. Harris, Alan G. Kamhi, and Karen E. Pollock, eds., *Literacy in African American Communities* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001); Theresa Perry and Lisa Delpit, eds., *The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, Language, and the Education of African-American Children* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Lisa Delpit and Joanne Kilgour Dowdy, eds., *The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom* (New York: New Press, 2002); Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin that Talk: Language, Culture, and Education in African America* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "Ebonics as an Ethically Sound Discourse: A Solution, Not a Problem," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 18, no. 1 (1998): 139-60.

At this point, Fowler could argue that what I have presented as conjunctive faith in the African American experience is really a Stage 4, individuative-reflective faith. From Fowler's perspective, although African Americans maybe born into a situation where they become both conscious and critical of another world view, yet African Americans dictate and determine the new meaning of Whiteness that does not any longer inform the Black self at a new stage of consciousness. In other words, the conversation is unilateral instead of dialogical.

Herein lies another example of the complexity of empowerment or moral agency among African Americans and the limitations of Fowler's developmental-structural paradigm. The system of advantage based on race is what African Americans are born into, and therefore, many African Americans have been critically reflecting on their world far before Fowler's model allows. Ruby Bridges was six years old as she became part of America's attempt to desegregate schools and fulfill democracy after the Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka Kansas Supreme Court ruling.⁶⁶ Then, there is a story of a black youth who was being interviewed by child psychiatrist Robert Coles who commented, "You've been asking me about how it feels, how it feels to be a Negro in that school, but a lot of the time I just don't think about it, and the only time I do is on Sunday, when I talk to God, and He reminds me of what He went through, and so I've got company for the week, thinking of Him."⁶⁷ For this Black youth, his theological reflection on the social crisis enabled to continue to struggle against injustice and struggle for justice. There are countless others including the Little Rock Nine who can be

⁶⁶ See Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), xi who was Bridges' child psychiatrist and who became involved in hearing and sharing children's stories as the result of having an eye-witness account of the mobs that attacked Bridges and the turbulent times in the southern part of the U.S. during the 1960s. Also see the film *Ruby Bridges*, Walt Disney Home Videos, 1998.

⁶⁷ Coles, xv.

summoned to give witness to the nature of critical reflection that occurred not only in mind, but also in context or experience in early phases of life for African Americans. The point is that both cognitively and experientially, African Americans have had to deal with negotiating the non-evil, heinous crimes of White adults and children, and the evil, dehumanizing acts of other Whites while also struggling to find self-worth that negates the death dealing forces and systems that would suggest otherwise.

This psychosocial, cognitive, and moral experience for many African Americans is extremely difficult and multifaceted. There are times when the cognitive claim that “all White people are not evil or bad” is constantly contradicted in experience, and therefore, integration of the new symbol and system of Whiteness becomes extremely difficult.⁶⁸ Then, there are times when integration by the African American is misunderstood or misrepresented because it appears to the White outsider as “reverse discrimination” or the perpetuation of segregation when in reality the African American radical or the integrationalist are just merely exposing the entrenched nature of violence and sin initiated by their White oppressors. For certain radicals, integration takes the form of calling the White oppressor to join them in the struggle for justice by renouncing their position of privilege and status. And, for certain integrationists, reconciliation between American democratic ideals and practice is at the forefront of their agenda. Hence, whenever and wherever inconsistencies and injustice persist, the integrationist works to make them right. On yet another level, African Americans struggle with how to project an image that is different from other African Americans who are really bad and

⁶⁸ See Edith V. P. Hudley, Wendy Haight, and Peggy J. Miller, *“Raise Up a Child”: Human Development in an African-American Family* (Chicago: Lyceum Books, 2003) for how the religious and theological teaching of African American families provide strength in helping their children and adults overcome, resist, and integrate oppression and segregation.

unintelligent according to the White dominant culture so that they can present an alternative view to appease the White conscience. In not romanticizing the Black race, they work to negotiate the good and the bad in both Black and White.

Fowler, insensitive to the history of oppression and dehumanization experienced by African Americans, is unable to fathom the depth of healing and empowerment that ensues as African Americans discover ways to be in and with the world. As moral agents towards healing and restoration in a society beleaguered with multiple systems of oppression, the African American moral agent reimagines, revises, and rewrites a world filled with increasing possibilities while the old world system of limiting possibilities is still with them. Unfortunately, all things are not made new. Hence, Fowler needs a model that includes yet transcends traditional notions of faith development because due to racism, the experience of African Americans is far more complex. Moreover, very few people, if any, in Fowler's study had been involved in such critical engagement of self and world in the manner of so many African Americans.⁶⁹

More specifically, Fowler needs a theory that includes how African Americans negotiate the symbols and system of Whiteness that they are born into and the Whiteness that becomes transformed or redefined by the moral agency of African Americans.

African American Christian responses and constructions are possibly different from non

⁶⁹ In Fowler's Stage 6, Universalizing Faith, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Mother Theresa are his exemplars. Interestingly, neither King nor Gandhi reflect nearly 98% of Fowler's sample population which was White. This suggests that Fowler uses people of different races, ethnicities, and nationalities when it is convenient to support his argument, but not in being sensitive to how his theory perpetuates the exclusion and denigration of those who are not White. In the end, a Black man, Indian, non Native American man, and a European woman are the models for his supposed universal theory of faith development, but only in the way they are presented and re-presented by Fowler, a White male. Furthermore, it does not appear as if Fowler allowed King to speak to him in order to reshape his understanding of Whiteness, Blackness, the Black experience, and thereby his own experience as a White male. What kind of theory could Fowler generate if he were to implement and practice his own theoretical heuristic?

African American Christians and African Americans who belong to other religious traditions. Furthermore, the similarities and differences between the new understandings of Whiteness as being constructed by African Americans can lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon of racism and oppression, and how best to change it.⁷⁰ If taken seriously, this could yield invaluable information on how new symbolic and conceptual understandings of Whiteness are informing and being informed by African Americans throughout their lifespan. The life and writings of Howard Thurman from a Black American perspective and Bishop Desmond Tutu from a Black South African perspective provide plenty of data for expanding Fowler's *Stages of Faith*.⁷¹

Finally, if Thurman, Tutu and other Black Christians are examined, Fowler will hopefully discover their understanding of a real God beyond the symbols instead of merely focusing on the conceptual, intellectual systems. This too will broaden his theoretical framework. As argued in the last two chapters, the religious experience of many African Americans has been emotional as well as cognitive, and they have experienced God in ways that are constantly overlooked or dismissed as being "childlike" or too emotional by psychologists and psychoanalysts like Fowler.⁷² From slavery to the

⁷⁰ Although I speak here of different responses and constructions of oppression and racism from an African American perspective, see Cynthia Burack, *Healing Identities: Black Feminist Thought and the Politics of Groups* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 19, for a discussion on how racism impacts and devalues different ethnic, racial groups in a unique manner. In other words, there is one oppressive system, but each group is affected differently.

⁷¹ In addition to the texts previously mentioned by Thurman, I would like to add *Footprints of a Dream: The Story of The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959). For the life and writings of Bishop Desmond Tutu see Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997).

⁷² See Moshe HaLevi Spero, *Religious Objects as Psychological Structures: A Critical Integration of Object Relations Theory, Psychotherapy, and Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) for an examination of literature concerning psychology of religion and the reductionistic approach that is often taken when providing therapy to people of faith. In addition, Spero provides an alternative model using object relations theory that allows therapists and counselors to affirm and create space for how "real" instead of "illusionary" objects of God are experienced by Jews in particular. He has not applied his theory in other faith contexts or systems.

present, many African American evangelical Christians have been able “to reconcile suffering and hope, guilt and forgiveness, tyranny and spiritual freedom, self-hate and divine acceptance. In that faith some of them found strength to throw off their bonds, and many others the dignity, when once emancipated, to stand up free.”⁷³ Throughout Black Church history, African American evangelical Christians have to come to know a real God in their resistance to the reality of oppression. Ironically or should I say paradoxically, Du Bois is right, the second consciousness that is imposed on African Americans has become part of the double-consciousness that keeps many from being torn asunder.⁷⁴

⁷³ Timothy L. Smith, 512.

⁷⁴ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

CHAPTER 4

ACCESSING POWER AMONG THE POWER-LESS¹

Thus far, paradigms and issues of empowerment have been presented through the educational philosophy and practice of Paulo Freire, the historical origin, development, and teachings of the Black Church, and the double-consciousness or psychosocial, ethical theory of W. E. B. Du Bois. The descriptive and analytical work has provided insights on similarities and differences between Freire, the Black Church, and Du Bois, and strengths and limitations of each paradigm or teaching of empowerment. In building on and critiquing further the contributions of Freire, the Black Church, and Du Bois, I first provide a discussion of my pedagogy of empowerment which integrates the work of the two scholars and the Black religious institution. This religious educational theoretical framework was developed and challenged as I conducted research in a local Black evangelical church. In other words, during the field work, my pedagogy of empowerment became crystallized as I reflected on my practice. At times, this organic interpretative lens was insightful, and other times it was limiting as I sought to understand issues of power and empowerment within my research site. The second section of this chapter focuses on methodology. An extensive description of narrative inquiry is provided as well as a rationale for choosing this particular research method. The third and final section is the research design of this particular study.

Reinventing Paulo Freire

When considering the context of education, a Freirean pedagogue does not seek to import Freire's pedagogy into her/his existential existence, but rather intensely examines

¹ The term "power-less" is rendered as such because it connotes an acknowledgment of social and political power that is far less than ideal, and not that of being totally bereft of power.

the oppressive conditions, forces, and structures in one's own educational and social setting. This necessary step enables the educator to be cognizant of the nature of oppression in one's own native soil, and the ability to speak directly to the specific forms of oppression as they are manifested in the particular context. This level of analysis and knowing requires a reading of multiple texts including traditional texts, people as texts, the educational space as texts, and group dynamics and interaction as texts. To use Freirean language, this "reading of the word" and "reading of the world" is conducted by both students and teachers in order to unveil reality and unleash new, transformative possibilities.

In general, my pedagogy of empowerment accounts for religious experience and the problem of the color line as articulated by Du Bois.² More specifically, I am more consistent with Freire in one area and loosely consistent in two other areas. As discussed in chapter 2, Freire's praxis or the integration of theory and practice is an integral component, and has much to teach the Black Church. As a scholar, academic practitioner who engaged multiple disciplines and contexts, Freire is an exemplar of how learning is a life-long process and of the necessity of repositioning oneself to listen to the people while leading. There are few, if any, Black and Womanist liberation theologians who have been immersed with the people and then accurately translate the people's voice to the academy and society in ways that engender empowerment and social change.³ Freire's

² African American females' religious experience is accounted for and derived from Du Bois' double-consciousness as described in Chapter 3.

³ In general, Black and Womanist liberation theologians employ methods that are more historical in nature. From the experiences and stories of African Americans in antebellum and postbellum America, these theologians create a discourse for the academy in the present to consider the ways traditional White male and feminist theology has excluded the voices and experiences of African Americans. However, as stated in my critique of Black theology in chapter 2, which applies to Womanist theology as well, there does not exist diachronic studies or methodologies to understand how contemporary African American religious experience is similar to and/or different from their ancestors of old. While these theologians do

mutual, reciprocal relationship with multiple texts and contexts is an organic process which provides a model for me as an African American practical theological academician in how to live a more integrated, authentic live in the academy, church, and Black community. With this praxis oriented approach, the language of the theological academy becomes infused with the contemporary experiences and stories of African Americans and thus, my theological framework is able to more readily speak to the existential reality of African Americans. Furthermore, the stories that we share and co-construct from our different yet similar social locations become texts of empowerment. In our growing ability to be naked and not ashamed with one another, we are able to rewrite our past, recover from the multiple wounds of oppression as we present to ourselves and the world a new story.

Two particular aspects of Freire's praxis that are integrated into my pedagogy are the dialogical and problem-posing components. These components allow for the teacher and student to be constantly engaged with make meaning of their worlds as a learning community. The content or knowledge to be learned is not monopolized by the teacher because the teacher positions herself to learn from the students in the teaching-learning process. Consequently, new understandings of the world and the particular phenomenon are shared between the teacher and students that allows for a body of knowledge that comes from the people and informs their being in and with the world in ways that a mere presentation of an academic analysis of the phenomenon or problem could not.

resurrect a necessary voice, they are often far removed from the very people they say they are trying to help. There are some Womanist practical theologians who have begun to bridge this gap between African American academicians and the African American community. See N. Lynne Westfield, *Dear Sisters: A Womanist Practice of Hospitality* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2001); and Evelyn Parker, *Trouble Don't Last Always: Emancipatory Hope among African American Adolescents* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2003).

The intense level of dialogue that is marked by my pedagogy requires the love, humility, trust, and hope that Freire speaks so passionately about. Freire's use of these terms is in the context of what the educator or teacher needs in order to be in authentic solidarity with the oppressed educand or student. Relinquishing one's position as oppressor and becoming a partner with the oppressed is viewed as a conversion experience to Freire, and love, humility, trust, and hope are the fruit of such a transformation. However, unlike Freire, in my use of the terms, they are required of both teacher and student as part of the spiritual formation or religious educational objectives for both teacher and student who are engaged in the resistance of oppression and the ongoing recovery of self.⁴

Both King and Thurman exemplify the nature of love, humility, trust, and hope that are represented in my pedagogy.⁵ King's compilation of sermons in *Strength to Love* encourages and exhorts the African American who is engaged in the struggle for racial justice. The title is quite fitting because in each sermon, one is confronted with the harsh, bitter reality of White supremacy and racial oppression coupled with King's deep river of love that refuses to neither acquiesce nor conform to a system of injustice. As a member of the oppressed, King speaks of the power and necessity of love as a force to transform the oppressive system. In addition, love enables the African American to rid off the toxins of hate and dehumanization in order to remain empowered as a prophetic, healing voice. Hence, from this particular Christian perspective, love is neither merely

⁴ Freire speaks voluminously on these characteristics in the context of the teacher, but does not relate them to the student. In his pedagogy, the teacher is one who was formerly the oppressor, and hence, the teacher must undergo a conversion in order to enter into community with the oppressed and to be sustained in the process. The student must merely develop critical consciousness.

⁵ See Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Cleveland, OH: Collins World, 1977; reprint, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981); and Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, chap. 5.

sympathetic or ignorant to one's existential reality, but rather the foundation of one of God's humble ones to trust in and hope for a new reality, a new world. In King's understanding of love, love of self and love of neighbor are embodied as both oppressed and oppressor become humanized in the ways the oppressed African American exhibits maladjustment in a corrupt system.

King's prophetic, public understanding of love as displayed in his sermons is affirmed by Thurman's prophetic, private or internal understanding of love. As a mystic, though not removed from the discourse on social change, Thurman is convinced of the power of love to free the disinherited from fear, deception, hate, and from being rendered invisible. Using Jesus as his pedagogical model, Thurman illustrates the depth of Jesus' integrated self in his ability to transcend racial, gender, and class barriers in order to make the love ethic central. From his parable on the Good Samaritan to his encounter with the Syrophoenician woman, Jesus embodies the love-ethic that springs from deep within his being by reenvisioning the "other" as neighbor. In redefining the neighbor, Thurman argues, Jesus demonstrates that "every man is potentially every other man's neighbor. Neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative. A man must love his neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between."⁶ Here, Thurman speaks to the value that is ascribed to the self and relationship which enables the disinherited to respond in ways that transcend constraining, alienating social mores and systems.

One of Jesus' penetrating demonstrations of the love-ethic is found in his redemptive response to the Roman soldier as told by Thurman. As a Jew under the religious and political domination of the Roman Empire, Jesus could have easily dismissed the Roman soldier's request of him to heal one of the soldier's ailing servants.

⁶ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 89.

I wonder what was going through Jesus' mind as the social enemy and oppressor approached him. Did feelings of anger emerge that had to be repressed? Did he feel respected because he was needed by someone who is deemed as socially and politically superior? Or, was Jesus stunned by the intimacy that existed between master and slave that compelled the Roman soldier to seek Jesus' assistance? Thurman asserts, for this exchange to take place between Jesus and the Roman soldier there was an "attitude of respect for personality . . . that all the individuals involved are within what may be called the ethical field."⁷ As the Roman soldier submitted to the person of Jesus by relinquishing his military, ethnic, national, and political privilege and power, Jesus was able to respond out of love for his neighbor instead of being dismissed or overlooked. At the moment of encounter, both were prepared to be received and seen as neighbor.

Thurman's love-ethic within the context of an ethical field suggests that the potential of being received and seen as neighbor should always be present even though the actual relationship may not materialize. In order to maintain the attitude of love and the possibility of being in right relationship, Thurman argues:

No amount of good feeling for people in general, no amount of simple desiring, is an adequate substitute. It is the act of inner authority, well within the reach of everyone. Obviously, then, merely preaching love of one's enemies or exhortations—however high and holy—cannot, in the last analysis, accomplish this result. At the center of the attitude is a core of painstaking discipline, made possible only by personal triumph. The ethical demand upon the more privileged and the underprivileged is the same.⁸

Thurman is consistent with King because King's nonviolent direct action is synonymous with Thurman's "core of painstaking discipline." Both present a love-ethic that must find strength to remain open to God's reconciling presence in history.

⁷ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 102.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

My concept of history within my religious educational pedagogy is another way in which I am loosely consistent with Freire. Freire understands history to be something that is not predetermined or fatalistic, but it is constantly unfolding and the oppressed must become subjects/actors in history instead of being merely acted on as objects in history. While I agree with Freire on a certain level, there are two limitations with his understanding of the moral or human agency of the oppressed that I speak to.

First, Du Bois' theoretical framework affirms that the actions of the hypocrite, radical, or yearning integrationist are all an exercise of agency in the world. This suggests that the oppressed are not a monolith and neither are the oppressed mere spectators or objects. Furthermore, the linear development of a critical consciousness as espoused by Freire has to be rethought within this context because each African American moral agent has a different end which is a serious challenge for the religious educator in dealing with diversity among the oppressed. How does an educator respond with integrity and affirmation of the African American selves when the hypocrite has a right to want to survive, the radical's stance for a greater degree of self-determination through an intentional separation is understood, and the integrationist's stance of wanting to survive and thrive in both worlds without the loss of either consciousness is just as legitimate? What and where is the common ground for unity among diversity among oppressed African Americans?

At the time of conducting research in the field, I was not aware of the glaring need for unity among diversity within the African American culture. Although I was conscious of the diversity of experience, and the discourse of the numerous labels and epithets that have been used to designate the people who were originally brought from

Africa by European human traffickers to the U.S, I was clueless on how this information could inform my pedagogy.⁹ Now, I know that I would do this study in a totally different way in light of this information. I would not begin with concerns or questions about empowerment, but about brokenness and the need for healing within the complex experience of African Americans. As feminist pedagogue Ann Berlak notes in her article, I would be challenging African Americans to recover dangerous memories so that they could become empathetic towards self and other African Americans, and/or outraged at what they and other African Americans have been subjected to in light of discriminatory, dehumanizing practices, programs, and policies in this country.¹⁰

Whether or not the focus on brokenness and healing would yield unity among diversity remains to be seen. However, I look forward to exploring how I can continue to affirm difference among African Americans while simultaneously challenging them to see the need for connection and inclusion within the culture and beyond.

The second limitation of Freire's understanding of history for my context is that he looks at history from a philosophical, humanist perspective that does not explicitly account for God's action and presence in history. Hence, within my pedagogy, history is a combination of what God brings and will bring to humanity (eschatology) and the human's ability to discern and respond accordingly to what God brings to the world.

Within this framework, justice is understood as an already/not yet reality that was

⁹ As evidenced in this study, depending on the time period and the particular social, political orientation of the author, the terms "Negro," "colored," "black," "Black," "African," and "African American" have been used to describe a people from Africa enslaved by Europeans who now live in the U.S. There are even times that when more than one term is used to describe the same group of people. This is true of DuBois in the use of his title *The Souls of Black Folk*. However, in his definition of the double-consciousness he uses "Negro" instead of "Black." Then, he employs the term "African" as that part of him that is yearning to be reconciled with his European self.

¹⁰ Ann Berlak, "Teaching for Empathy and Outrage in the Liberal Arts," *Educational Foundations* 3, no. 2 (1989): 69-93.

inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth. This justice and reign of God awaits fulfillment though the participation of God's people here on earth.¹¹ Finally, where Freire dismisses the people's religious understanding of the world as being merely magical and naïve, I take seriously theological interpretations of the world. Like any other lens that makes meaning of the world, theology possesses the capability to illuminate or obfuscate reality.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry, a qualitative research method, explores the experiences of individuals in a particular context that is presented and understood through a narrative paradigm.¹² Researchers who employ this method contend "experience happens narratively."¹³ This emphasis on the role of story or narrative in a person's lived experience suggests that at any given moment in time, a person is an actor or character who contributes to and is part of a larger historical narrative. Hence, in the examination and exploration of a particular experience within a particular context, the researcher gains access to a continuous experience that is both personal and social.¹⁴

More succinctly, Clandinin and Connelly assert:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social action with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry

¹¹ In teasing out my already/not yet understanding of history from a theological perspective, I am somewhat consistent with Freire concerning his view of the fulfillment of democracy within his postcolonial context. He believes that participants must be trained in and towards democracy as they transition out of an oppressive, backwards society. Thus, an already/not yet mentality exists in Freire's framework as well. The major differences are the role that God plays in my pedagogy as opposed to Freire's, and my emphasis on justice from a theological perspective instead of democracy from a social, political perspective as is found in Freire.

¹² Clandinin and Connelly, 18.

¹³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴ Ibid., 2. They assert that experience is 1) continuity and 2) both personal and social. Continuity refers to the notion that present experiences grow out of past experiences, and present experiences lead to future experiences. Then, the personal and social nature of experience refers to the notion that as individuals, people are grounded within a social context which situates them in relation to people, structures, institutions, and systems.

still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social.¹⁵

In this explicit definition of narrative inquiry, there are two points I wish to highlight.

First, the collaborative nature of this research methodology between researcher and participants allows the potential for learning and teaching to be experienced by all involved. Moreover, unlike many conventional research methods, the researcher does not merely gather information from the participants for one's own academic research purposes, but also seeks ways in which she can assist the participants in the process. This collaborative process can be mutually beneficial and empowering for both research and participants. Second, the researcher enters a place and time that has its own rhythm and flow. In entering, the researcher has to exercise wisdom on how and when to enter. This requires building relationships prior to the actual conducting of research so that the researcher can enter into the matrix as smoothly as possible in an attempt to minimize the presence of the unnatural element (the researcher) in the natural setting.

Like Freire's pedagogy, narrative inquiry as a research method affirms the notion of reflection in action.¹⁶ As researchers reflect on their experience in the field they understand this to be equivalent to "knowing-in-action."¹⁷ Therefore, knowledge is generated from and strongly connected to the researcher's site of inquiry.

Because the research method begins with experience instead of theory, the purpose of narrative inquiry focuses more on "the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic"¹⁸ than generating "a set of knowledge

¹⁵ Clandinin and Connelly, 20.

¹⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹⁷ Ibid., 37.

¹⁸ Ibid., 42.

claims that might incrementally add to knowledge in the field.”¹⁹ With a primary focus on depth and relevance, narrative inquiry allows the researcher to illuminate aspects of existential reality that have been overlooked or dismissed as inconsequential. The nuancing and/or amplification of experience can in turn question previous knowledge claims which could then lead to the reformulation of theoretical paradigms. A case in point is my analysis of the experience of African Americans which questions some of Fowler’s *Stages of Faith* knowledge claims and thereby raises suspicion concerning the generalizability of his structural developmental model.

Although narrative inquirers begin with experience instead of theory, researchers must be careful in how they present and represent participants in the broader narrative. There may be a tendency of the researcher to use formal or reductionistic categories when those categories do not accurately reflect the experience as told and lived by the participants.²⁰ When this occurs, the researcher has imposed her research agenda on the site and has not allowed herself to hear and see “the patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes”²¹ that would more accurately represent the participants’ experience. In order to minimize the inconsistency between researcher’s perspective and participants’ experience, the researcher should be in dialogue with participants as experiences and stories are constructed.²² Participants should be allowed to read these early drafts to affirm and/or correct the way in which their experience is being crafted. Otherwise, the validity of the study is severely compromised.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Clandinin and Connelly, 141.

²¹ Ibid., 132. This is how narrative inquirers interpret field texts or the information/data that was gathered from the study. Field texts include but are not limited to letters, conversations, poems, memoirs, archival documents, photographs, and journals.

²² Sharan B. Merriam, “Assessing and Evaluating Qualitative Research,” in *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis*, ed. Sharan B. Merriam and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2002), 24.

One major way in which I am not a purist in applying narrative inquiry is my attention on accessing, documenting, and helping to create social change through action as a researcher. This kind of research is more consistent with participatory action research or what others identify as participatory research.²³ While there are many similarities between narrative inquiry and participatory action research such as collaboration, eliciting and analysis of experience, and both being qualitative in nature, they can also complement one another. Participatory action research does not allow the researcher to be in the moment as does narrative inquiry. As one who has experimented with participatory action research, I found myself being too preoccupied with mobilizing people for some social, political action instead of allowing that particular action to emerge. Moreover, I constantly questioned my work in the field because I was trying too hard to move towards change instead of having the maturity and patience to know how to facilitate the process as researcher. With narrative inquiry as my primary research method, I am not encumbered with change for the sake of change, but free to examine, explore, and be with people and their experience as we construct meaning together that gradually moves us to different ways in which we relate in and with the world. In this endeavor, change is a natural process and not forced or contrived.

Research Design

The primary focus of this study is to understand the empowering role, or lack thereof, of the Black Church in the life of its members and the Black community by reinventing Freire (create and implement an empowering pedagogy), and examining the

²³ See Patricia Maguire, *Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach* (Amherst, MA: Center for International Education, University of Massachusetts, 1987); and Randy Stoecker, "Are Academics Irrelevant? Rules for Scholars in Participatory Research," *American Behavioral Scientist* 42, no. 5 (February 1999): 840-54.

strengths and limitations of my reinvention through documenting the challenges and outcomes of the pedagogy in action while teaching in a contemporary, local evangelical Black church. In accomplishing these ends, an adult Bible study curriculum was co-developed and co-implemented by my pastor and me.²⁴ My pastor worked from his biblical, theological tools and resources in his construction of the curriculum, and I as well along with my engagement of Freire. This Bible study occurred once a week for 10 weeks from June to August.

The following questions are the inquiries that I brought to this study:

1. Will traditional, evangelical theological notions of the self emerge as a hindrance in the design and implementation of a pedagogy of empowerment?²⁵
2. What kind of pedagogy of empowerment is relevant for a local Black evangelical church in a racially and socio-economically diverse community with many low socio-economic members?
3. What does a local Black evangelical church empower its members and community for?
4. Are institutional changes necessary for a local Black evangelical church to empower its members and community? If so, what are they?

²⁴ A collaborative approach was taken in order to remain consistent with narrative inquiry and participatory action research, and to assist the pastor in developing his religious educational and leadership skills that would engender his desired goal of empowerment in the life of his church and the community. As researcher, I wanted to enter into as natural of a setting as possible and that required that the pastor continue to teach and lead the Tuesday night adult Bible study class while as usual. If I would have taken a more visible teaching role at the beginning, this would have been done specifically for the research study and would have constituted a fabricated setting instead of a natural one. My pedagogy emerged out of and was critiqued in my conversations with and assistance of the pastor, and time teaching, reflecting, and in conversations with other leaders.

²⁵ A particular aspect of Protestant evangelical theology asserts a pejorative view of the self in which the self is considered to be depraved and wretched with a marred, distorted *Imago Dei*. This theological understanding of the self purports that the self or human is alienated from both self and God due to the sin of Adam and Eve, and self-determination is equivalent to the pride that was manifested by the world's first parents.

Context and Participants

Holy Light is a Black evangelical church, and is affiliated with the Church of God, Anderson, Indiana.²⁶ The church began in 1988, and has had two pastors. The present pastor has been the leader since 1992.

The church is located in a rural, southern California city. It has been here for a little over a year. There are five predominantly White churches within a mile radius of the church. To the south of the church is situated a piece of land called "Little Africa." The residents of Little Africa are African American of low socio-economic status, and although many are involved in gang violence, drugs, and alcohol, there are those who have put down their bottles, joints, and affiliation with a gang for a moment when our church has visited them and prayed with and for them. Some single mothers and grandmothers have seen us as a sign of hope instead of despair, a haven from the rough streets, and a calming, soothing presence for their once fearful souls. Weekly, the pastor and other members share of the encounters with the people of Little Africa, and the mutual blessing and encouragement that takes place for those of us in the church who go out and connect with our sisters and brothers in Little Africa who may never come into our local building. While there are some who decide to come, there are others who have been through our doors, but are no longer with us. Premature deaths of several young

²⁶ The Church of God, Anderson, Indiana is a predominantly White Protestant Christian association. Association is used instead of denomination because this particular group of Christians began in response to the perceived oppressive bureaucracy that existed in the White Mainline Protestant denominations such as the Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians. This association began with a vision to give control and power to the local congregations instead of to the denominational bodies. Consequently, each local congregation is not obligated to belong to or participate in activities sponsored by the broader association although all prospective clergy must satisfy the standards established by the national association. Within this national association, there exists a Black branch of the Church of God, and a White branch of the Church of God. The Interstate Association of the Church of God is governed by African American clergy and churches because they felt that the national association was not adequately meeting their needs. Holy Light is a pseudonym.

men through gangs have stolen them from their mothers, sisters, brothers, and us, the church. We have gone to the site where the blood and body of a mother's son lay where we have sang and prayed for a new day of peace, of healing, and of hope.

To the north and east of Holy Light is yet to be covered territory. To the north are White middle-class and affluent residents, and to the east are African American middle-class and affluent residents. We (the church) continue to struggle with the reality of how to be present to those in Little Africa when we do not possess the material wealth and resources to engender authentic empowerment. We need our sisters and brothers to the north and east of us in order to bridge the gap that exists between Black and White, educated and uneducated, and the well-off and the poor. As a church, we continue to struggle with how to be reconciled along these and other social lines. Prior to this study, we did not have a systematic approach of empowerment in place to the community even though social action and pastoral care were being exercised.

There are approximately four hundred members in Holy Light. Most of the members are unemployed and underemployed. It is a young church with approximately 95% of its members who are under the age of 50. With over twenty ministries including a GED program for adults and a tutorial program for elementary students, the pastor for nearly fourteen years desires to create a culture and leadership style that is empowering for the congregants and community. However, the pastor struggles to implement and fulfill his vision because he has not discovered how to overcome the following identified obstacles: 1) The internalized, negative attitudes of self among many congregants, 2) The lack of trained congregants and leaders to develop a culture of empowerment, 3) The low socio-economic status of many of the congregants, and 4) the painful history of the

seventeen year-old church and the church's need of relational healing and sound, stable leadership.

The painful history of Holy Light includes how the existing pastor, Pastor Anthony Stewart, became the senior pastor.²⁷ Before this time, Pastor Stewart had helped the previous pastor start the church and he served as the director of Christian education. Also, he had recently remarried after being abandoned by his first wife to parent four young children. As a father of four children with his second wife, Pastor Stewart was confronted with another great challenge. When Pastor Stewart received a phone call from the previous pastor while he was preparing for finals in undergrad on his way to becoming a dentist and a graduate with a pre-medical degree, his life took yet another turn. As Pastor Stewart sat on the other end of the phone, he heard the previous pastor say that the church is in his hands because he could not do it any longer.²⁸ At that moment, he sensed that God had called him to drop everything and respond affirmatively to the call of becoming the senior pastor.

I became a member of the church in the fall of 2000. Upon entering graduate school, I sensed God's call for me to attend this particular church even though I had never attended the church, and had met Pastor Stewart once when he had conducted a three-day revival at my home church in central California. Although I was a licensed minister of the Church of God, I was not interested in assuming a clergy role when I joined the church. However, I was interested in discerning how I could be of assistance in and to the church that did not involve clergy responsibilities while being in graduate

²⁷ All names are pseudonyms.

²⁸ The previous pastor was going through a divorce, and had recently lost one of his children who was hit by a car as he ran across the street to buy an ice cream from the ice cream truck in front of the church.

school. I actively pursued the possibility of becoming the superintendent of Sunday School,²⁹ but decided that I did not have a vision for the particular ministry and decided not to assume responsibility for that position.

In the summer of 2003, I began to discern my niche within the body of the church. I had to do an internship for my graduate program, and Pastor Stewart and I agreed to co-teach an adult Bible study series on vocational discernment. From this study and internship, several serious issues were exposed in the leadership structure of the church. First, the existing leaders were not sure of their particular calls and responsibilities in the life of the church. Furthermore, they did not feel they were being adequately trained to perform their responsibility as elders.³⁰ Second, Pastor Stewart was in search of a model or structure that would fit the needs of his church, but was unsuccessful during this time although he had read White Christian leaders and businessmen such as Rick Warren and John Maxwell. In 2001, he had tried to implement Warren's design but to no avail because the elders became caught up in the title of "associate pastor" without possessing the servant-leader characteristics that were necessary to fulfill such a role.³¹ Third, the church was able to draw many people from different walks of life, but many people would come and go. Many who were being assimilated and nurtured in the church and faith did not stay long enough to give back what they had received. In other words, the leadership pool was not increasing but being taxed by the great needs of the laity, and the high turnover of church membership.

I was hired as the church's consultant in the summer of 2003 in order to address leadership issues, and remain in that role to the present day. In this study, I wore the

²⁹ The title of "superintendent" is the same as the director of Christian education.

³⁰ This is the assessment of the elders that came up during the once a month elders' meeting.

³¹ This is Pastor Stewart's assessment.

multiple hats of researcher, consultant, member, and clergy.³² As an insider and outsider, I was able to gain access to the experience of the pastor and many of the leaders in ways that probably would not have occurred if I was just one or the other.

Data Collection (Field Texts) and Analysis

In general, data collection and analysis are done simultaneously in qualitative research studies.³³ Unlike linear research studies, qualitative studies are in process, and the researcher needs the freedom to test emerging concepts, themes, and categories on one hand so that they would not be overwhelmed with information at the end of the study on the other hand.³⁴ This reflects the knowing-in-action that is characteristic of qualitative research in general and narrative inquiry in particular. More specific to narrative inquirers, Clandinin and Connelly use the term field texts instead of data.³⁵ Hence, I use the term field texts as well when referring to the information gathered and analyzed.

There were multiple field texts in this study. Before the Bible study series on empowerment began, I had given Pastor Stewart some suggestions to assist him in the development of the Bible study curriculum. These suggestions and questions for reflection were generated as the result of our numerous previous conversations concerning empowerment and leadership in the Black Church context. Also, I had met

³² From the summer of 2003 to the present, I have been instrumental in assisting Pastor Stewart in theological reflection and the design of a leadership model for the church. In addition, I have connected him and the church to other African American clergy and a Christian clinical psychologist within the last year. The African American clergy have served as advisor to Pastor Stewart, and the Christian clinical psychologist have trained six of our leaders in the areas of relational healing, communication, discipleship, and self-awareness. Pastor Stewart and I felt these areas were necessary as the church takes time to heal from the wounds of the past in order to live into its called future. This was a one-year training that gathered once a month for three hours that ended in October of 2005.

³³ Merriam, 14.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Clandinin and Connelly, 4.

with the leaders who were meeting with the clinical psychologist after one of their sessions to inform them of the nature of the study and ask if they would like to participate in a way that would help them reflect on their leadership style of empowerment, and how they were experiencing empowerment under the leadership of Pastor Stewart.³⁶ As I shared with them the title of my study, and how they could participate in a more direct way, the energy of the conversation quickly switched to their experience with the clinical psychologist. For the next two hours, they questioned me concerning the purpose of their time together when many of the leaders who were asked to participate by the pastor had fail off and were not in attendance. Three of the leaders have been with Pastor Stewart since the beginning of his pastorate, and they were tired of the lack of accountability that was prevalent in the church. They aired their frustration with leaders who do not submit to Pastor Stewart, but who continue to function in their leadership role without any consequences for their actions. Furthermore, they often felt as if Pastor Stewart undermined their authority as leaders at times because he would pacify members who were upset with some of the decisions made by the church leaders. In essence, they were clueless concerning Pastor Stewart's expectations of them as those who were faithful in light of those who were not as faithful yet still functioning in a leadership position. They wanted clarity from him, and I could not speak for him.

As consultant and the person instrumental in coordinating the process, I asked the leaders how they wanted to respond to the problem. Because they wanted to protect Pastor Stewart and not put him on the defensive, they suggested that I present their concerns to him and then set up a time for them to meet with him. I agreed though

³⁶ This approach was initially taken because many of the leaders would not be able to attend the adult Bible study because they would be teaching other classes during that time.

reluctantly. I did not want the leaders to become dependent on me to present their issues and concerns to Pastor Stewart because this could disempower them. Nevertheless, I realized that they trusted me with their deep frustrations and concerns, and I knew their response was out of concern and love for themselves as well as Pastor Stewart. They wanted to address the problem in a manner that would be productive and affirming for everyone involved.³⁷

After this meeting with the leaders, I learned two important lessons that had direct implications on my research study. First, I became aware of a different side of the pastor that I was not privy to before. The undermining of leadership by the pastor was a major problem of the lack of leadership structure and stability, and possibly contributed to the high rate of turnover in the life of the church. However, I did not feel led to broach the subject with him immediately. He admitted to the leaders that he was moving away from this unhealthy practice, and that this was not a common practice as it was in the past. Yet, I had to find the appropriate filter to continue to hear his experience and story without assuming or imposing his previous behavior on him in the present. This was not easy. Constant prayer and reflection, and hearing the voices of others in relation to him helped me to understand his story without being either too harsh or too soft. I was challenged to affirm and journey with him on his road to empowerment while holding him accountable for a practice that was antithetical to his desired goal. Second, I was exposed to some of the deeper issues in the leadership life of the church as the result of

³⁷ When I met with Pastor Stewart, I presented their concerns and he was very receptive to addressing their concerns. He scheduled a meeting immediately, and I contacted the leaders to confirm their availability. At the special meeting between Pastor Stewart and the leaders working with the clinical psychologist, I was the facilitator. Both the leaders and the Pastor were encouraged by the meeting because Pastor Stewart was able to hear about some of his leaders' frustration and weariness firsthand, and the leaders were able to hear from Pastor Stewart some of his challenges and the ways he was learning and working to lead the congregation. They agreed to meet periodically to maintain connection to and understanding of the pastor's vision and leadership.

Pastor Stewart's leadership. After hearing the leaders' experience and concerns, I decided to jettison the component that would help them reflect on their leadership style of empowerment, and pursued an avenue of helping to create structures that would allow for the pastor and leaders to work together in creating the culture of empowerment. From several conversations that I had with the leaders after the two-hour impromptu meeting, I learned that there exists a lack of communication between Pastor Stewart and his leaders. I was yet to understand the full nature and scope of this particular problem.

Now I return to the other field texts that were part of this study. I attended each of the ten Bible study sessions, eight as a student and two as a teacher. The Bible study series included about fifty adults with about a 5.5:1 female to male ratio. After praise and worship, and offering, the study usually lasted for sixty to ninety minutes. As a student, field notes were generated during and after the sessions that were used to inform the conversation when I met with Pastor Stewart. As a teacher, the texts include my time of preparation, reflection, and evaluation. Pastor Stewart and I met twice a month, and each meeting lasted two to three hours. During this time, we reflected on several leadership issues in the life of the church and the Bible study.³⁸ I created the agenda for our meetings, and also made several recommendations as the consultant that were directly related to his goal of empowering leaders and the community. In addition, we planned our next steps for the Bible study and the elders' meeting.³⁹ The elders met once a month

³⁸ For the most part, these meetings were not audiotaped for two reasons. First and foremost, I did not want to become dependent on the audiotape that I would not tend to the conversation in the moment. Second, I did not have the financial resources or time to transcribe the tapes. However, I did audiotape one session because I considered it to be a crucial component of the study that I wanted to capture in writing and on tape.

³⁹ The elders had not been meeting for nearly a year. This was due to the fact many of the elders were about of the group of leaders that were meeting with the clinical psychologist, and we did not want to overburden them with meetings. Pastor Stewart and I continued to plan for the restructuring and

and these meetings lasted three hours as well. Finally, as I was translating field texts into research texts, Pastor Stewart and the leaders read these texts to insure validity in my presentation of their experience and story.

Besides the ongoing analysis of the field texts throughout the process of the study, the information was categorized in two other specific ways. The field texts that spoke directly to the questions that I had posed as part of this inquiry constitute one way of making meaning after the departure from the field.⁴⁰ Within these responses, there are other patterns and associations identified that reflect another level of analysis of field texts.

Before I move on to the presentation of my findings, I need to draw attention to the fact that the Bible study series that was designed and implemented by the pastor and me was a starting point and not an ending point. As noted, I did not stay confined to the adult Bible study setting, but created meaning and gathered information as I moved in and out of multiple settings within the life of the church. The only field text that is not explicitly named is the time I spent in Sunday morning worship service and first Sunday night service. There were moments when I needed to relinquish my hat as researcher, and just be minister and member instead of being both researcher and minister. However, reference to the worship experience and other experiences or events that I did not capture as individual field texts emerge as influential factors when they were included in

enhancement of the elders' ministry during the time they were not officially meeting. We launched the first informational meeting concerning the elders in June 2005.

⁴⁰ These were my questions as researcher that were developed independently from the pastor and other church participants. The pastor brought his concerns and questions as well that were identified in the context and participants' section. We did not attempt in our teaching to only elicit responses that would respond to our concerns, but were open to the ways that information from the class challenged our previous understanding and perceptions concerning empowerment. In reinventing Freire, I was teacher and student as I encouraged my pastor to do the same. After I left the field, I questioned my approach in developing research questions independently of the people I was collaborating with. Unfortunately, as I was writing my dissertation proposal, this issue and concern did not come to mind. Next time, I will do it differently.

conversations between Pastor Stewart and me, and were topics of discussion during the elders' meeting.

Findings

Research Question #1: Will traditional, evangelical theological notions of the self emerge as a hindrance in the design and implementation of a pedagogy of empowerment?

Through Freire, the Black Church, and Du Bois, I have communicated my understanding of the African American religious self as being a subject instead of object, who creates history, and desires to fulfill one's duty to God as God's child in a country that needs assistance in accomplishing its lofty democratic ideals. Furthermore, because of the problem of race and racism, the African American religious self lives with paradox and complexity that informs how she relates in and with the world. With this question, I sought to understand how the participants understood self-determination or empowerment within their African American Christian experience in relation to Freire, the Black Church tradition, and Du Bois' theory of double consciousness.

The participants in this study did not give any indication that they were either influenced by or cognizant of traditional, evangelical theological notions of the self throughout the duration of the study. Within the evangelical tradition in general, and African American evangelicalism in particular, there is an emphasis on the lowly, depraved state of humanity that is in need of a God to restore humanity's marred condition. Biblical proclamations and theological assertions such as "all of our righteousness are as filthy rags," and "there is none good, no not one" are heralded as a reminder that the human being is utterly flawed. This pejorative view of the self stands in opposition to claims of empowerment discourse such as "do for self," and "self-determination" because it is perceived to be equivalent to the pride that was manifested

by the world's first parents, Eve and Adam. As noted in chapter 3, within the African American culture, it was the Black Power movement and not the Black Church that introduced this concept into the freedom struggle of African Americans. While I have worked through my reconciliation of the doctrine of Original Sin and empowerment in my contemporary experience, I was eager to explore how others might begin to question a traditional Christian doctrine, or possibly find the conversation and Bible study on empowerment as being anti-Christian.

Even though the issue of the self within the context of evangelical theology did not emerge in the study, there were other illuminating and affirmative perceptions of the self that are worth noting. This occurred on the fifth Bible study lesson when Pastor Stewart began to address issues of gender and empowerment more explicitly and extensively. He introduced Luke 7:36-50 to the discussion as he shared on the nameless female prostitute who anointed Jesus' feet in the company of other men. After he expounded on the act of the woman, and Jesus' affirmation of the woman and the simultaneous silencing of the crowd of men who were trying to question Jesus' response to such a woman, Pastor Stewart posed a question to the women only. He asked, "Do you feel empowered or disempowered?" He also informed the women that it was important because he wanted to include their feedback in the way that he articulated the vision of the church.

As he stood waiting for a response, Sister Barbara received a microphone and posed a question back to him.⁴¹ She said, "I need for you to clarify empowerment for which context." As Sister Barbara continued, she stated, "Are you asking us to speak

⁴¹ In the African American Church, we refer to laity as Sister and Brother. This has to do with our fictive kinship in Christ, and God as our parent.

about empowerment from our personal experience, in the church, or what?” Pastor Stewart told her that he was referring specifically within the church. When she understood the nature of the question, she proceeded with:

I feel empowered in the life of the church under your leadership, but I did not know that women were equal to men until I heard you teach on the equality of women in the ministry of Jesus. Prior to this point, I had felt as if women were second class citizens and that was the way that it is supposed to be because of my experience in other churches. We need more teaching on this topic.

When I heard Sister Barbara make this statement, I went back nearly two years ago during an elders’ meeting. At the meeting, I raised the question about a biblical text (I Timothy 3:1-7) that was being used to define characteristics and responsibility of an elder, but the text did not refer to women. Needless to say, as I raised the question to understand how to be inclusive of all at the meeting, we spent time attempting to justify the text, but not really getting at the heart of the question. At the end of the meeting, I was accused of speaking out of my woundedness as a female clergy because Holy Light did not discriminate against women in leadership. I retorted with the necessity to clarify interpretation of traditionally perceived oppressive texts because other churches use the same text to argue against women in leadership, and we as Holy Light leaders needed to be clear on how we differ theologically and biblically in the interpretation of the text. Like my sister who was sharing about her new insight and the need to teach more on the topic of equality of women, I too, then and now was arguing for clarity on the biblical text because so many women may not know how Jesus affirms and celebrates the woman, the female.

At my next meeting with my pastor, I brought the elders’ meeting up within the context of Sister Barbara’s statement, and iterated that her point was my point as well—

to provide additional, clear instruction for both females and males who may have interpreted the text in a more negative, dehumanizing fashion. A nervous laugh came forth as I shared and asked for an apology. Pastor Stewart, in a humble, authentic way, apologized and said,

It's like racism. When you feel you are doing better than everyone else, you don't realize the ways that you are not being sensitive to the issue. I know I am far ahead of many of my colleagues who do not have women in ministry in their churches, but I realize that I must continue to be sensitive to the issue.

I listened, and did not push any farther. I received and appreciated the apology, response, and realized how powerful of a moment for him to make such a confession. I was glad and humbled by the way he was hearing women's experiences in both the past and present, and challenged to rethink how to live into the future in light of the connections he was making.

During our time together, Pastor Stewart made reference to Sister Felicia's comment that caught his attention. He recalled the response of a sister who had experienced resistance and problems from other women in the church, but not men. He sensed her empowerment as she shared her experience, and the way she had learned to overcome the perceived jealousy of other women by knowing that she is a child of God.⁴²

As Pastor Stewart was sharing, my mind went back to the night of the study because I was sitting to the left of Sister Felicia when she had shared her experience. What immediately came to my mind upon hearing her was internalized sexism—women erecting obstacles for other women to traditionally male roles in the church because they

⁴² All of the eight women who responded to the pastor's question concerning empowerment indicated that although they came to the church with a lot of baggage and issues they have learned to understand who they are in Jesus Christ which has empowered them. One indicated a relationship with a seasoned, elderly women that contributed greatly to their sense of empowerment and growth in the faith.

have accepted their prescribed role. After I moved away from my academic analysis, I celebrated within the manner in which she shared. Prior to her comment, the other women had shared about their experience of bringing baggage and how other women was able to assist them in their new understanding of self in God and Jesus Christ. However, when Sister Felicia shared, she went against the grain. She spoke to an issue that possibly other women were afraid of sharing or did not know how to share if they had experienced such potential oppression. Yet, in this dialogical, problem-posing process that was initiated by Pastor Stewart, Sister Felicia expressed her voice and affirmed her reality in spite of it being different from the other women who had shared.

Although I knew the way in which I had observed the empowerment of Sister Felicia, I wished I would have inquired further into what Pastor Stewart noticed or had experienced to come to such a conclusion about one of his congregants and female ministers. I did not know how to interrupt the moment with my interest as he was dealing with new insight concerning women in the church and ministry.

Research Question #2: What kind of pedagogy of empowerment is relevant for a local Black evangelical church in a racially and socio-economically diverse community with many low socio-economic members?

With this question, I sought not only to address educational outcomes, but also what and how religious education should be delivered. Earlier in this chapter, I provided a discussion of how I reinvented Freire pedagogically. This reinvention represents the how that emerged, and was constantly challenged and refined throughout the duration of

the study.⁴³ Now, I will focus on certain educational outcomes, content, and context in light of my pedagogy in process.

First and foremost, the formal category of race and racism, which is the major interpretative lens in my pedagogy, was not used by participants in this study.⁴⁴ This finding suggests, for some reason, that race and racism are not natural topics of discussion even when you are discussing issues of empowerment in a predominantly African American religious setting. Moreover, many participants could have resigned to the fact that this is just the way it is until Jesus returns. In other words, racism is something that cannot be changed or transformed. Or, the focus on gender issues became a dominant category instead of race. Yet the African American women did not appear to make the connection between the oppressiveness of both race and gender.

I became aware of the limiting, confining analysis of race in my pedagogy after an elders' meeting. After hearing Pastor Stewart share about the way he related to a small number of individuals in the church in a more direct, confronting fashion and many others in a more doting, nurturing manner, I wondered why this was so. Certain leaders at the meeting commented that the congregation needed to become more familiar with the former Pastor Stewart instead of the constant presentation of the nice, friendly, and highly sociable Pastor Stewart. There were clearly two different sides of Pastor Stewart that only certain people had experienced, and no one questioned why this was so. It was as if everyone understood the reason why, so the question was irrelevant. However, I

⁴³ I will discuss Pastor Stewart's pedagogy (how and what) in a separate section. This will allow me to focus specifically on the development that occurred in his teaching, and to give attention to our different approaches to the study.

⁴⁴ Although Pastor Stewart and I have had numerous conversations concerning race, racism, and the Black Church prior to the study, the construct of race was not a hot topic of discussion for us or anyone else during the study. There was one comment made in an elders' meeting that was explicitly about race, but I decided not to pursue it because I did not want to give the comment more weight than it deserved.

began to question the ability of the interpretative lens of race to provide any clarity or insight to the situation. I sensed there was something else at play, and that race was not necessarily the cause even though it could be considered as a factor.

As I sat and listened, I was somewhat in a state of disbelief. I did not want to make any hasty judgments or accusations. I knew I was not comfortable with what I was hearing, but I did not know how to express it in a way that would facilitate exploration and reflection. I sat with the information, and left the meeting emotionally and spiritually taxed. When I got home, I continued to wrestle with what I had heard, and what others had experienced first hand. As I picked up a pen to write down the stirring in my soul, here are the words that emerged:

I think at Holy Light it is less of a struggle against racism, classism, sexism, or any other ism, and more of a struggle against self—the fighting for and retention of the soul, the security, the stability, and consistency that are necessary conditions in being and becoming a self.

This statement is loaded, and I realized what I was and was not trying to assert as I attempted to make meaning of Pastor Stewart's behavior and his struggle to create an empowered culture. On one hand, I was saying there is a need to begin with the self in order to understand one's connection to an oppressed group. Many academicians and critical race theorists start from the position of the oppressed group in an attempt to account for the particular. While this approach may provide scholars with common language to converse about issues of power around race and racism, it does not leave much room for difference of response to and experience of racism by those who are oppressed. In the mundane experience of the masses, oppression is interpreted and exhibited in particular, non-reductionistic yet complex ways instead of abstract, academic language.

On the other hand, I was not saying that systems of oppression such as racism had nothing to do with the present observation. However, whatever role racial oppression and injustice were playing in this particular situation, there was something else that was more concrete and accessible, and would more accurately explain Pastor Stewart's inconsistent interaction with his congregants.

When I came to this place in the study, I was empowered. I did not feel forced to elicit stories in my teaching and conversations based on racism in order to fill in the perceived gaps and holes. Rather, I chose to be sensitive to how adult congregants in general, and Pastor Stewart specifically would eventually name their oppression which would allow for greater access into their world, and not mine.

For the adult participants, a moment of clarity came during a Bible study that I led. The leader of the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman, was the main character that we explored and engaged to understand empowerment as a person of faith.⁴⁵ During this lesson, as participants were astounded and encouraged by the faith of such a woman who returned numerous times to the south to deliver those whom she loved from the bondage of slavery, I learned of contemporary, concrete forms of oppression. As Sister Venita got the microphone situated in her hand, she spoke of her experience as an ex-prostitute and her desire to go back to the street where she once walked in order to help deliver other sister prostitutes from their bondage. Another sister grabbed the microphone, and this was a face I did not know. As she began to speak, she confessed

⁴⁵ This Bible study consisted of a review and extension of the concept of empowerment within a theological context, a dramatization of the life of Harriet Tubman, and then reflection on Harriet's life based on questions and comments that was generated and posed by the participants in their small groups, and responded to by the participants. In an attempt to make Harriet's experience and story alive for today, I suggested that the participants who asked the question would pose it to Harriet, and the person or group who responded do so in first person as though they were Harriet.

that she was a new Christian and that she too was an ex-prostitute and cocaine-user, and was so glad that we were having this discussion because churches do not like to talk about these issues. She briefly shared on what the Lord had done in her life in delivering her from the streets and drugs, and after she had testified, the church erupted into praise. There was a freedom to name one's oppression, and not be judged. There was a freedom to say where they had come from, and to not distance themselves as if they were better. There was a freedom by those of us who have never been involved in prostitution to encourage and to celebrate with them their victory over the stigma and shame. In the words of one of the leaders, "deliverance took place in a simple, unfamiliar way."⁴⁶

Similar to the sister congregant participants who had gained distance from, and was learning to deal with their painful past, Pastor Stewart was about to face for the first time in nearly twenty years the departure of his first wife. During a leadership training session, he confessed to not being a spiritual father and pastor to the church. He admitted that he had been too soft on certain members because they could not handle the real him, and was assertive with certain leaders because it was to help bring out the best in them. A couple of days after coming into a deeper understanding of his pastoral role and identity, Pastor Stewart had to confront his ex-wife who was a member of the church. He asked her to find another church home because he finally realized that he was not able to pastor her in a way that she deserved. Furthermore, he acknowledged that he had not dealt with her departure and he needed the space to heal from the past in order to be and

⁴⁶ This statement by one of the female leaders refers to the typical way in which deliverance occurs. Often times, there is a lot of praying and shouting in order to position ourselves to receive God's presence and delivering power. The arrival of God's presence can be a short time or it can be an extended time. However, during this Bible study, the deliverance happened in the moment. I did not have to lead or coax. I and others followed the spirit of God as the Lord was being manifested through the sisters who were sharing their experience, their story. At the end, a sobering, non-romanticized voice emerged that challenged the leadership to consider how to provide biblical instruction so that ex-prostitutes would be able to go back to the streets and not become entangled with their past.

become a more effective pastor. When he shared with the leaders his decision, he provided additional clarity to why he would pacify the laity when they came to him with a complaint about one of the leaders. Pastor Stewart, humbly, yet confidently, admitted that he did not want the lay members to leave the church. His fear of abandonment was being overcome. The chains of fear were being loosed. As he shared his vulnerability, he was encouraged, affirmed, understood, and celebrated by many leaders who have experienced both sides of Pastor Stewart.⁴⁷ A new day was beginning in the life of the church, and I had gained direct access to the reason behind Pastor Stewart's inconsistent leadership and behavior that was not necessarily related to issues of race and racism.

The emphasis placed on deliverance in this Black church caused me to question my pedagogy on another level. Would "pedagogies of deliverance" instead of "pedagogies of empowerment" have been more appropriate? Deliverance is a term that is closely connected to the African American evangelical holiness experience. The notion of spiritual bondage and God's deliverance are the linguistic symbols that are used to connote freedom or deliverance from a "vice" such as drinking, smoking, and sexual immorality, and from stronger spiritual bondages such as prostitution, crack-cocaine, and perpetrator of abuse. As noted previously, deliverance was a term used by a female leader to describe what had taken place during Bible study. Furthermore, it was also used by one of the sister participants in drawing a parallel between Harriet Tubman and herself concerning going back to deliver those you were once in bondage with. However,

⁴⁷ Although many, if not all of the adult leaders encouraged him for his decision and the growth, there were certain youth and young adults who strongly disagreed with his decision. They questioned why the pastor was using Rhonda, his ex-wife, as an example when so many others have been able to carry on without any discipline and consequences for their behavior. Pastor Stewart's decision hit the youth and young adults hard because Rhonda was working closely with these ministries. It was great to hear the leaders' support of Pastor Stewart while still being sensitive to the way the youth and young adults were feeling. Their feelings and voice were not dismissed because Pastor Stewart had a separate meeting with them, and they also shared at the general special meeting that was called by Pastor Stewart.

in this deliverance process, it is focused on the individual at the exclusion of the systems that also contribute to the brokenness in human experience. While deliverance from the system is good, dismantling the power of the system is needed as well. Hence, my pedagogy would have to become more focused on the particular vices that people are struggling with and/or have been delivered from. From here, I could then move to an exploration of the social as well as spiritual systems of dehumanization at work behind the practices. Hopefully, this will educate and empower participants on both personal and social sin, and the need to live in ways that brings personal as well as systemic deliverance.⁴⁸

In summary, a praxis, dialogical, problem-posing, and sensitivity to and knowledge of the immediate, more concrete forms of oppression within the African American evangelical experience is the kind of pedagogy of empowerment that appears to be more appropriate and relevant for this particular context.⁴⁹ Moreover, God was understood as the external empowering agent. God was believed to be, and experienced as active in history to deliver. Faith in a God who delivers does not remove human responsibility because once delivered, the human must not become enslaved again by that which God has delivered her/him from.

⁴⁸ In this collaborative process, Pastor Stewart and I had two different ways of approaching the curriculum. As will be demonstrated below, he began the study with empowerment as an idea. I would have begun the Bible study curriculum with empowerment as an experience. In other words, I would have assessed the participants' cognitive understanding and personal encounters with empowerment. When I taught, I attempted to integrate both theory and practice while maintaining continuity to the groundwork that Pastor Stewart had already established.

⁴⁹ I am not making a definitive statement here because of the short time frame of the study, and Pastor Stewart's pedagogy cannot be excluded from how participants made meaning of and experienced empowerment. I do not think we confused participants with our similar yet different pedagogies, but at the same time, I am not sure of the influence of his pedagogy on some of the outcomes that I had experienced. In future studies, I will spend more time on conversing about pedagogy before, during, and after the study with my collaborator so that we could be clear on similarities, differences, and reach some conclusion on how we would evaluate the process.

Research Question #3: What does a local Black evangelical church empower its members and community for?

This inquiry explored the continuity and/or discontinuity between the historical Black Church, and a contemporary, local Black church concerning empowerment. The historical Black Church empowered its members to read, write, fulfill their duty as children of God, address the wrongs of a history of slavery, segregation, and racial oppression, and help this country live up to its democratic principles and ideals. Furthermore, the historical Black Church was perceived as the voice of the Black community regardless of one's religious affiliation.

In general, the focus of empowerment is for the work of ministry and how it (empowerment) can help every area of a person's life.⁵⁰ More specifically, in Holy Light, there was some continuity with the Black Church tradition. The elementary tutorial program and GED adult program represent the church's commitment to education. Another example of this commitment is the graduation celebration that occurs annually in June for all graduates from preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle school, high school, vocational school, junior college, postsecondary, and graduate school. This special day acknowledges the educational achievements of graduates, and encourages others to press on. Pastor Stewart launched this celebration, and also envisions the establishment of a Bible institute.

Beyond the educational connection, the struggle for democracy and racial justice that were dominant in many Black churches are yet to emerge in Holy Light. Although Pastor Stewart demonstrated compassion and love towards those in the community and within the church, he did not articulate a social, political vision that was commensurate

⁵⁰ This is a summary of what Pastor Stewart shared in the first study on empowerment.

with a justice, democratic orientation.⁵¹ However, at our last meeting, he had a book by Aldon Morris and shared about a non-profit organization called Christians Organizing for Prophetic Engagement (C.O.P.E.).⁵² One of his colleagues is the director, and he wanted Pastor Stewart to read the Morris text and then they would have a discussion. This may be the catalyst to help Pastor Stewart make the connection between Christianity, democracy, and social justice in ways that I have not been able to.⁵³ If and when he does begin to make these connections, I will be there as a conversational partner, colleague, and sister who will be ready to help him develop and embody a relevant theology of empowerment that includes yet transcends reaching lost souls for the kingdom of God, and deliverance from the bondage of personal sin.

Research Question #4: Are institutional changes necessary for a local Black evangelical church to empower its members and community? If so, what are they?

This question helped me to understand how Holy Light was sensitive to external and internal oppression in its attempt to empower its congregants and community. Self-reflexivity is an integral part of the process of ascertaining internal institutional problems and those that exist outside of the institution but yet strongly influence what happens in

⁵¹ At the end of the study, I brought to Pastor Stewart's attention how he had mentioned in a meeting with the elders that he did not intend to be democratic in his leadership style, yet he was asking them to share their perspective about the ways they felt empowered or not by his leadership. When we were together, I asked him to explain how he perceived his leadership style if he was neither authoritarian nor democratic. He replied that it was both authoritarian and democratic. As the pastor, he held a theology that he is ultimately responsible for what happens to the church, and certain things that he hears from God is non-negotiable. This was the authoritarian bent. Then, on other issues that are not non-negotiable, contributions from others are received because he does not have all the answers. To put it mildly, we disagreed on issues concerning pastoral leadership and democracy.

⁵² Although I did not read the text by Aldon Morris, I think it is necessary to cite it because it was the text that Pastor Stewart was reading in the midst of his transformation. See *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1986).

⁵³ The purpose of this study was not to convert Pastor Stewart to my theology or me to his. However, in light of his contact, some of our theological differences and disagreements will hopefully be put in a context that will hopefully reopen the dialogue, and lead to a more concerted effort to address the social, spiritual, and political ills. Although he calls me a modern day Sojourner Truth, I am not sure of the connection he makes between me and one of our foremothers, Sojourner Truth. Maybe I have influenced him in ways that I am not aware of at this time.

the church's life. The praxis, dialogical, problem-posing pedagogy and narrative inquiry research methodology were well suited to examine institutional limitations, capacities, and outcomes.⁵⁴

As was demonstrated earlier with Pastor Stewart on women and empowerment, he discovered the need to address more explicitly Holy Light's biblical and theological teaching on the equality of women. He realized that although he was different from many of his pastor colleagues and friends concerning sexism, he was not to be excused from the ongoing engagement of the affirmation of women in Holy Light. The fact that he acknowledged the need for change was powerful even though we never clearly identified how this change would take place in the life of the church. I anticipate the next time a biblical text is used to define the role and responsibility of an elder and how Pastor Stewart will exegete and apply the text to Holy Light after his teaching experience and new insight.

⁵⁴ The most influential and grounded literature on institutional research is found in higher education and organizational management and leadership. See Peter T. Ewell, "To Capture the Ineffable: New Forms of Assessment in Higher Education," *Review of Research in Education* 17 (1991): 75-125; and "Outcomes, Assessment, and Academic Improvement: In Search of Usable Knowledge," in *ASHE Reader on Planning and Institutional Research*, ed. M. W. Peterson (Needham Heights, MA: Pearson Custom, 1999), 552-86; Catherine Palomba and Trudy Banta, *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999). My study was not in the context of a public school or business setting so I bring a different approach to institutional assessment because I worked within the life of a religious institution. I did not begin with identification of outcomes, but explored what they were in a naturalistic church setting. In addition, although I had a focus on the role of empowerment and racial understanding, I was open to the ways these constructs would be challenged throughout the study. This latter component occurs as well during pilot studies of institutional and outcomes assessment. However, in many instances, the goal is to gain more information to insure that the institution can effectively assess the construct instead of being challenged to dismiss the construct altogether and go in another direction. The time consuming nature of institutional assessment and research, and financial constraints limit the ability to be flexible in institutional research. Although I had time and budget constraints too, my pedagogy and research methodology allowed for more flexibility in the areas of ongoing analysis and adjustments.

The further inclusivity of women in Holy Light was just one area of potential change in Holy Light. At the completion of the study, Pastor Stewart began to ask some interesting questions regarding teaching and learning. Below, his journey of pastor as religious educator is revealed to indicate another possible beginning of institutional change in Holy Light.

Pastor Stewart began with empowerment as an idea, a concept within the Christian tradition.⁵⁵ He drew mainly from our religious well as he took us to Acts 1:1-8. He exhorted on the role of the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit as the one who empowers the church of Jesus Christ, and not just an individual. A faith community that is empowered by the Holy Spirit has been enabled or authorized to carry on the work of Jesus here on earth is what I was hearing from the mouth of my pastor.

Pastor Stewart's entrance into the study intrigued me. Pneumatology or the study of the Holy Spirit/Holy Ghost/Spirit of God is a topic that is rarely explored in detail in our church settings. Non-Pentecostal, evangelical African American churches mention and refer to the Holy Spirit, but do not give ample attention to the ways that the Holy Spirit enables us as a body of believers to be a representation of God here on earth. Most of the instruction is on how to live a "holy" and "godly" life as an individual, but not as a community. He piqued my interest on if and how he would deal with the tension between the personal and social, individual and community concerning empowerment.

⁵⁵ Tradition centered religious education is one of six models taught by professors of religious education at Claremont School of Theology. Person centered is another model that is addressed in this study that is also part of the six religious educational models. However the other four (church centered, family centered, mission centered, and earth centered) are not addressed in this study. Pastor Stewart did not use the language of tradition centered and person centered religious education, but I do in order to provide meaning and significance for Christian educators and pastors who assume a huge responsibility of the teaching and learning process in the life of the church. Even though he does not use the language, the way he taught the curriculum is consistent with tradition centered and person centered religious education.

When he introduced the concept of relationship into empowerment during this first study, Pastor Stewart challenged individualism and classical notions of autonomy or freedom. Because empowerment is grounded in the faith community's relationship to God and one another, the church exists, in part, to celebrate and affirm the gifts and calling of the individual and the individual gives new life and depth of empowerment to the faith community. I wanted to shout during this initial Bible study because the paradoxes and tensions that Black churches tend to ignore and/or do not know how to handle, were about to be exposed.

My hope was dashed as Pastor Stewart inquired from the participants "How many feel empowered?" When many raised their hands, he followed up with "What are you empowered for?" When the individual responses began to flow, the tension and paradox that my soul was yearning to address was not being satisfied. I heard a retreat to non-relational, conventional understandings of living out one's empowered life. For example, a brother who was a visitor commented that he had been empowered to become a counselor, but the Lord had shown him independent of church leaders. I did not inquire if the brother was a member of another church or religious group, or if he believed his spiritual life could function just as well outside of an institutional faith community. Nevertheless, what caught my attention concerning his comment is that so many people today have taken on an individualistic spiritual and faith commitment that is void of relationship to religious institutions. Then, on another hand, I recalled how when I was nineteen how I believed I was being called by God to the preaching, pastoral ministry but I did not accept because I was in a church that did not believe in women as preachers and pastors. I could have been one who left the religious institution of the church because

back then, relationally, it had become more stifling and dehumanizing instead of affirming and life giving. As I sat, listened, and reflected, I wondered would Pastor Stewart engage the complexity of relationship and empowerment that was weighing heavy on my mind.

On a certain level, Pastor Stewart did address the complexity. In addition, participants began to make connections between relationship and empowerment in ways that reflected the tension between the individual and community. For example, at the second Bible study, Pastor Stewart posed a question to help participants reflect on one's call and the awareness of the degree of urgency to be empowered to fulfill one's call. Sister Tina stated, "God brings you through something to help someone else. I was going through the same situation that another young lady was going through, but I was in a different spirit, and I was able to influence her in a positive way." Sister Daphne made the connection between relationship and empowerment when she noted, "Others have told me that when they see me praising the Lord, my praise has encouraged them." When I heard Sister Daphne's comment, I was reminded of a comment a mother in the church had made to me over two years ago.⁵⁶ She mentioned that when she heard my laughter of praise during worship service she sensed healing in her body from pain.⁵⁷ Other comments and responses as these indicated that participants were seeing themselves as being connected to something larger.

In the fifth session of the Bible study, Pastor Stewart's insight and instruction on the upper room experience in the book of Acts began to speak directly to issues that were

⁵⁶ In the African American church, we refer to elderly women who have demonstrated a life of commitment to the faith and the church as church mothers. These mothers are surrogate and spiritual in nature. For those in the church who never had a mother, who is not near their mother, or whose mother is deceased, the church mothers are able to help fill the void.

⁵⁷ I do not remember the exact body pain from which the mother was suffering.

going on in my mind. He argued that the diversity of people who were following Jesus' instructions to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit had to address critical issues and differences in order to prepare for the day of Pentecost. In that upper room of 120 people, there were eleven of the twelve disciples who came from different social, political, and religious backgrounds, Mary the mother of Jesus and Jesus' brothers, and other women who were not named.⁵⁸ Pastor Stewart allowed his imagination to see into that upper room and he discussed how gender differences had to be ironed out as well as those who had a biological connection to Jesus from those who did not. He brought out how they had to possibly work through some jealousy issues among the disciples because Peter, James, and John had more intimate moments with Jesus than the other disciples. In his midrashing of Acts 1:12-17, Pastor Stewart opened up another model that could be used to engage difference in the life of the church that would lead to working through and obtaining unity among diversity instead of dismissing and forfeiting the possibility of inclusivity and difference in the faith community.

Unfortunately, Pastor Stewart did not continue to build on this theological and biblical insight. Although we were both excited about the possibility of what it could yield as we talked about it during one of our conversations, other issues, topics, and frameworks crowded out the continued development and reflection on the upper room experience. However, I know that I am not finished with exploring the fruit of his insight and connection for faith communities that need to learn how to deal with both internal and external difference. As Pastor Stewart presented, contemporary Christian communities can draw from our tradition and possibly emulate or add to Thurman's democratic model within the context of Christianity.

⁵⁸ See Acts 1:12-17 (NIV) for a brief description of those who were present in the upper room.

Pastor Stewart's transition from tradition centered religious education to person centered religious education was not necessarily clear and distinct. His reflection on persons emerged in the context of his focus on empowerment as an idea and the Holy Spirit as the source of the church's empowerment. Tradition centered religious education was still the overarching paradigm, but when he began to focus specifically on the experiences of women and empowerment in Holy Light, he was able to see how tradition does not always affirm the particular. When Sister Barbara had shared her perspective on her experience of empowerment in Holy Light as noted in the response section of my first research question, Pastor Stewart was both encouraged and humbled by her comment when he shared during one of our conversations. He was loosed from the burden of depression and guilt that he had been carrying since Holy Light was assessed three years ago by a Christian research institute.⁵⁹ After hearing Sister Barbara's comment, Pastor Stewart realized that empowerment was a process because people come with different experiences and backgrounds. Basically, she helped him pay attention to individual differences in the life of the church that he was not nearly as sensitive to prior to this time. He was able to put into perspective that empowerment does not happen for everyone at the same time, and the baggage that certain people bring take longer to address than other people's issues or baggage. He was beginning to realize what many educators in K-12 education have been claiming, "One size does not fit all."

⁵⁹ See Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Guidelines of Healthy Churches* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996). Natural Church Development discusses the research of churches worldwide and how Schwarz and his associates are using the information in assisting dying churches. The premise of Natural Church Development is that healthy churches naturally reproduce in the areas of church growth and effectiveness. Hence, the goal is to understand how to become a more healthy church based on the assessment criteria and research of Schwarz. When Holy Light was assessed, the minimal factors of empowerment and communication were identified as weaknesses in the life of the church. In other words, according to the findings, the church was not empowering its leaders and laity, and there was not effective communication taking place in the life of the church.

The second and final shift that occurred in Pastor Stewart teaching praxis was his initial stage of questioning how to integrate theory and practice. This happened at the very end of the study after I had left the field, and we were reflecting on the Bible study process together. Admittedly, when I heard him pose this question, I was sort of shell shocked. There were numerous things that were going on in my mind as I tried to be attentive to the serious nature of his inquiry. I was wondering, how did he get here? Did he realize that praxis or the integration of theory and practice is what I attempt to do in my religious education pedagogy? Did osmosis occur without either one of us being aware of the process? What was it that brought him to this place?

In my mind, I was not very helpful at the time of the conversation. I listened to him draw parallels between medical students and their residency where theory and practice are integrated before they become independent, certified practicing physicians to what possibly needs to happen in Holy Light in the preparation of its leaders. He was wondering how this could be done in an effective, efficient way where leaders would not just get theory independent from practice, or be ministers without any grounding in theory. I believe part of his inquiry came from his experience of having poured a lot into his congregants as far as training, teaching, and preaching, but he has not experienced the desired results of people becoming empowered to respond to the needs in the church and community.

In gaining distance from that moment, a major reason why Pastor Stewart has not experienced empowerment to the degree that he desires in Holy Light is because he has just begun to understand his role as pastor. As he continues to live out his call, he will become more aware of his personal strengths and limitations, and how to respond

accordingly out of both. What is significant to note is that Pastor Stewart's awareness of himself as a religious leader came as he has been challenged to think of new ways of being, seeing, and leading with the questions that I pose as he articulates his vision. As one who seeks to embody empowerment, I have been able to mirror back to Pastor Stewart his words and goals in ways that help him to make connections between his theory, theology and practice. For him, this process has proven invaluable because rarely did he get the opportunity to hear himself think, re-think, and make meaning of a given situation as he leads. Consequently, he is considering the possibility of sharing power with another individual in the church in light of his limitations, something that is rare in many African American evangelical churches.

Though it has not always been an easy process and relationship for neither one of us, I am honored, happy, and humbled to have the opportunity to work with a man who has embraced and respected my gifts and calling as woman. I have been able to experience greater depths of healing and redemption because of Pastor Stewart's willingness to be challenged by and learn from me, a woman, who is his junior in age and the ministry. To God be the glory!!!

CHAPTER 5

EMPOWERMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN UNLIKELY WAYS

The purpose of this study was to provide an educational analysis of the Black Church to illuminate how this religious institution has empowered its congregants and community. Furthermore, through the integration of theory, research, and practice, continuities and discontinuities were documented between the historical Black Church and a local, contemporary Black church.

In light of this interdisciplinary, diachronic, and integrated study, there are numerous connections that can be made concerning the relevance and significance of this study. First and foremost, I focus on the disciplines of Black Church studies, Christian education, and Black and Womanist liberation theologies. Secondly, within these major fields of disciplines, a narrative of moral agency in both the historical and contemporary Black Church is interwoven. In honoring Katie Cannon's critique of traditional notions of moral agency, I explicitly name the various types of moral agency exhibited by the Black Church in both the past and present.¹ Finally, while there is room for engagement and applicability beyond the aforementioned fields, the reader, regardless of one's social, ethnic, religious, and/or academic location, can determine how the findings from the study can be applied.² As Freire encouraged a reinvention of his pedagogy (or his integrated educational theory and practice), I, too, through the use of narrative inquiry, have submitted to the process of reinvention and rethinking of my findings for contexts and disciplines that I do not intentionally engage here.

¹ In Chapter 3, I clearly articulate the four types of the African American moral agent. However, in this chapter, I discuss moral agency in ways that both include and transcend the four types discussed in chapter 3.

² Merriam, 29.

In conveying the significance of my findings, I begin with a discussion on my multiple roles and functions while doing research in one's faith community to draw attention to the challenges yet rewards of being both an insider and an outsider in the field. Next, the insignificance of race and racism in this study is examined, and the implications for theological academicians are presented. Then, the import of empowerment within a local Black church for Black Church studies is presented. From Black Church studies, I move on to challenge the Black Church and local Black churches. Finally, I conclude with a brief reflection on my pedagogy in process in light of one particular finding as I continue as consultant, member, clergy, and unofficial researcher in my church and look forward to conducting qualitative research in other local Black churches.

Conducting Research on Empowerment in the Black Church

Freire, unlike me, did not have to wear multiple hats when he entered post-revolutionary contexts to educate for empowerment. Furthermore, he did not even enter the field as researcher in the traditional sense, but as educator, scholar, and activist which were not discrete identities because for Freire, education is political and includes the integration of theory and practice. When theological academicians attempt to reinvent Freire, this fact about Freire is important to remember. The different starting places of academic research versus one's lived experience have strong implications for how one does her theology, pedagogy, assessment, and reporting. The academic context is another political field that one must adhere to in order to be considered as one who does quality, relevant research and scholarship.

The academy's constraint, or for some, a measure of accountability is one thing that Freire did not have to consider. He was empowered by the political regimes of the countries that hired him. Freire's relationship in and with political parties and governments provided him with a greater degree of freedom and power that many, if any, U. S. theological academicians doing this kind of work do not have. Moreover, Freire was not a researcher in the same sense that researchers identify themselves in this country. He learned of and from the people as one who cared for the people. Hence, his research approach was intuitive and integral to his pedagogy. Research was not something that was done separate from or in addition to his pedagogy as is often done in the U.S. He did not write to be published, but he published because he wrote and recognized his ideas for himself and others who were interested in his life-long conversation. He did not have to deal with the politics of "publish or perish."

In light of understanding the degree of Freire's freedom, I realized the degree of my constraints and the difficulty of doing such work while having to wear multiple hats. I became more patient with myself and the process upon this discovery.

For me, the intersection and discrete identities of researcher, consultant, member, and clergy became conflicting roles at times in the study, and at others complimentary. The tension was identified in moments as minister that I did not want to bring or put on my researcher's hat because I felt that would violate and reduce the manifestation of the sacred in Holy Light's material, social experience. In my roles as researcher and consultant, I was eager to document observations and experiences that would lead to further reflection and insight concerning empowerment. My antennae and radar map were attuned to the ways I heard and observed members and visitors of Holy Light

making meaning of their world as a faith community in dark skin. However, as minister, I was challenged to be in a space of silence, of unknowing and not knowing because I wanted to decode their experiences and stories instead of encode them. During certain moments as clergy, my role as researcher was put aside as I trusted the process, the God of the process, and the people that when the time was right, the silence and mystery of the past would be made known.

Another aspect of the tension had to do when my role as researcher had to prevail over the minister. There were certain dispositions that I exhibited as researcher that would not have been the case if I were just a minister. For example, I would not have been taking meticulous notes at one of the Bible study lessons to the point long after we had prayed and dismissed, I was still writing and reflecting. I was approached and greeted by one of the leaders who was wondering what I was writing down, and jokingly stated, “Stop writing because I will have to read all that you are writing.” As the brother quickly came and left, I remained focused on where I was as researcher. I barely greeted him because I was captured by the moment. During that time, I was researcher first and foremost and my ministerial identity was not as present.

When I became aware of the conflicting roles in my research study, I developed a greater sensitivity towards the difficulty of my work of doing research as ministry and ministry as research. On one hand, this understanding of minister as researcher emerged during the course of the study that helped me to think about how to encourage pastors, other clergy and lay leaders to do research in particular religious institutions. In other words, minister as researcher allows space for reflection on practice, and discussion on how practice is assisting in reaching the religious and spiritual goals of the church. In

Freirean language, this is praxis, in religious language it is called theological reflection, and in higher education, the process falls under the rubric of institutional research and evaluation. Minister as researcher can be a formal or informal systematic approach to assisting contemporary Black churches in becoming more effective, relevant, and prophetic. Unfortunately, this would constitute an institutional change for many Black churches because many pastors and lay leaders are busy doing and not reflecting, or totally suspect of knowledge and ways of knowing that transcend their own particular knowledge base.

On the other hand, my role of researcher as minister posed its own problems. Because of the collaborative, participatory, and repositioning of my power and privilege as researcher in the matrix of this study, I approached the research process as one that could potentially serve or minister to the members and visitors of Holy Light. With the orientation of researcher as minister, I was able to focus on the ways that my roles were not only in conflict, but also how they were complimentary. I began to see that although I was not always in the traditional role of minister as preacher, as teacher, as leader, and as confidante or counselor, I was bringing a service to the church in a way that was unfamiliar and nontraditional for both the church and theological academy. In this new, unconventional role, I was able to offer my being to a faith community that received and embraced me.

I was affirmed, empowered, and healed in my role as researcher as minister in Holy Light. On one occasion after I had led a Bible study lesson, Sister Anna with two young children, possibly her grandchildren, came up to greet me as I was talking to two mothers of the church. When the sister hugged me, she said these words, "Thanks for

your knowledge.” I smiled with joy and gratitude, and replied with “You are welcome, and thank you for your enthusiasm and contribution during the small group time. I saw you were into the discussion.” As Sister Anna was leaving with the two young ones, I was humbled by the comment, but could not give attention to the depth of her statement at the time. A couple of days later when time and space were conducive for further reflection on Sister Anna’s comment, I began to cry. I cried because she did not know what that simple phrase meant to me as one who has struggled to bring my mind and my intellect to my faith community and religious experience. She did not know that there were times when I used to preach and teach in ways that did not minister to the people’s needs and experience. She did not know that the questions that I had posed in my previous church experiences during Bible study and business meetings were often overlooked because the pastor and leaders did not know what to do with me or the questions. She did not know the pejorative perception of many theological academicians of congregants and parishioners who assume that church people are too conservative and narrow minded. She did not know that she had contributed to my process of affirmation, integration, healing, and empowerment as an academician who understands my call to the Church. From this sweet, precious, unexpected yet brief encounter, I was able to celebrate my journeys in the academy and church, and envision new ways of being relevant in and bridging both.³ Interpsychic healing and reconciliation had taken place which empowered me to envision the possibility of peace and justice in my academic and ministerial posts.

³ Sister Anna’s comment was not the only words of affirmation that I had received. There were others who shared their appreciation of my perceived unique way of ministering through dialogue and drama. The fact that many in the church come from different religious and educational backgrounds made Sister Anna’s comment all the more rewarding, humbling, and empowering. I was discovering how to bring my gifts, calling, and training to bear in a diverse yet predominantly monoethnic context.

As a researcher who was also a member of the church, a greater sense of community was embodied as we gained access to and learned from each other's journeys. Sister Anna was able to name and receive from my academic insight although I am not quite sure what specifically she was thanking me for. Then, the sisters in chapter 4, Barbara, Felicia, Venita, and the one I did not know, felt a sense of freedom to share of their past and present in ways that made them vulnerable and subject to marginalization and disdain. Each, in their own way, provided a window into their souls as they spoke about personal issues of empowerment in church and society. Moreover, with this insider's lens, I was able to provide insight on the Black Church experience that someone who had never been a member of a Black church would not have been able to illuminate. As Pastor Stewart and other participants trusted me, I was given the awesome responsibility and honor of receiving gifts untold. In their experience, comments, and stories, Holy Light participants had their say and to me, they were writing a world unknown and untold that I was privileged to behold. Although Pastor Stewart and the other participants' names do not appear on the cover of this text, they nevertheless were acknowledged by me as co-authors.⁴

Race and Empowerment in the Black Church

As a researcher and member of Holy Light, I had assumed that I would be able to readily observe and elicit stories from the Bible study curriculum and other church

⁴ In the middle of the study, I had discussed with two members of my dissertation committee the possibility of Pastor Stewart and the participants of Holy Light as being additional authors of this research project. It was my attempt to maintain integrity in my use of Freire and build on him because in the process of becoming subjects and rereading their world in order to rewrite it, the oppressed or marginalized should have full access to all that this entails. In other words, this study was not a solo project. Also, unlike many qualitative researchers, I did not own the story. I came to the process that all participants owned the story because without them there would not be a story to be told. However, after talking to my committee members, I decided not to pursue the idea because of time limitations and the lack of experience in such an endeavor during this time of my academic career.

contexts concerning issues of race and racism. However, racial identity was not a major construct that participants used to make meaning of their faith identity and development. There are several reasons that could possibly explain why the construct of race played a limited role in the contemporary Black church, but yet a major one in the historical Black Church.

First, the social and cultural oppressive conditions of 18th, 19th, and early 20th century Black Christians were more clearly defined. From slavery to Emancipation without immediate political, social, and economic inclusion to Reconstruction that failed at reordering the oppressive system and consequences of slavery to legalized segregation marked the different epochs of oppression and struggle for humanity among African Americans. The laws, customs, and mores of those days were clear because everyone, both Black and White, knew their place and role in a racially unjust society. However, even in the midst of such potentially debilitating conditions, many Black Christians found a way out of no way. Timothy L. Smith asserts, “Endurance without acquiescence, then, and submission which because of its religious character pronounced judgment upon oppression became the bondsmen’s moral ideal.”⁵ Therefore, even in their bondage, the early African American Christians were able to redefine morality and moral agency that best reflected their social, religious reality. As moral agents, they critiqued the system that held them captive in an attempt to be free or separated from it so that they could live more fully in ways that embodied a Christian theology of humanity’s duty and destiny alongside their White sisters and brothers. In essence, the enslaved African American Christians never relinquished their responsibility in obeying God’s laws and commandments, and in knowing that they were accountable to their God and Judge even

⁵ Timothy L. Smith, 498.

in their position of bondage, they persevered in hope of serving God without the added burden of social and physical chains.

In commenting on the leadership and moral agency of Maria Stewart, Womanist Bible scholar, Clarice J. Martin asserts, “Stewart advanced adherence to Christian faith and promoted unrelenting involvement against those forces that sought to overwhelm the purposes of God for the human community.”⁶ Consistently, African American Christians relied on their theological insight which grounded and informed their ethical response of engendering a new vision and reality for race relations. As reconciling moral agents, Stewart and other early Black Christians saw the interconnection between spiritual and social salvation. Infused by the power and presence of an immanent, personal God, they became empowered by the One who was bigger than and active in their social condition.⁷

Second, unlike the remote and recent past, today, racism and oppression are not clearly defined and understood. In a post-civil rights and supposedly postmodern era, African American Christians find themselves living with people of diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Within this new demographic reality on U.S. soil, the Black and White dichotomy of the past does not do justice in explaining the complexity of lived experience. The old construct ostracizes or alienates those people or groups who are neither Black nor White, or who are both Black and White. Hence, new tools and methods are needed to unveil the deadly, insidious presence of racism that persists.

⁶ Clarice J. Martin, “Biblical Theodicy and Black Women’s Spiritual Autobiography: “The Miry Bog, the Desolate Pit, a New Song in My Mouth,” in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 25.

⁷ Ibid., 29. Here, Martin discusses Sojourner Truth’s encounter with her White mistress, and how Truth was convinced that she would receive her son back through the help of God because Truth knew God had what she did not, money.

Giving voice to the different layers and dimensions of racism today is invaluable in assisting the African American Christian moral agent.

One particular tool that can speak to the complexity of racism today is Andrew Sung Park's theological paradigm of the wounded.⁸ In his critique of the limitations of Christian theology, Park asserts that the sinner and sinned against have different spiritual and psychological needs and paths instead of everyone falling into one category that is normally expressed by traditional Christian theology. In short, the sinner stands in need of salvation from the sin perpetuated against his/her neighbor, and the sinned against stands in need of liberation from the physical and psychological violation of his/her being at the hands of the sinner.⁹ Here, Park speaks directly to Christians who believe they are saved from damnation, but who do not have space or an adequate Christian theology to address the deep wounds or infliction of them as one journeys through life.¹⁰

Furthermore, Park does not deny the reality of being both sinner and sinned against when he states, "As the oppressed/oppressor, we need both salvation and liberation in life. There are times when we need to focus on liberation more urgently than salvation, and vice versa."¹¹ Hence, those who claim to be Christ followers are challenged to constantly look within and without, and to work towards being in right relation with self and neighbor.

What Park's theology does for African American Christian moral agents in the present is allows them to deal more appropriately with the wounds that they have received at the hands of the dominant, oppressive culture. This approach leads to the

⁸ Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004).

⁹ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁰ Ibid., 5

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

examination of both internal and external forces that have shaped one's being. It entails the recovery of dangerous memories that may be both individual and collective in nature. It requires a wrestling with powers and principalities that have taken root in one's being and/or have plagued one's being. In addition, this process of healing requires a wrestling for the recovery of self that is not done in isolation and usually cannot be achieved on one's own power alone. Knowing and submitting to that power or being which is greater than the person and the person's problem, and trusting others to journey alongside are touchstones for the recovery and healing of such deep wounds. Herein lies another component of the African American moral agent who seeks the help of God and others in hope of becoming a new self who creates a new world in response to the oppression.¹²

The early African American Christians knew of the need to rely on someone more powerful than the White slave masters, lawmakers and enforcers of the law in the way they relied on the God of Christianity to deliver them both spiritually and socially. However, in the retelling of the Black Church's story, little, if any, attention is given to the healing that occurred as well in God's delivering presence.¹³ Unfortunately, untreated or mistreated wounds could lead to spiritual and social annihilation and the perpetuation

¹² As a reconciling African American moral agent, I seek to name injustices as I experience them in order to help generate reflection and new responses or actions for participants in the community. Due to the silence on race issues, there is little evidence concerning my ethical response to racism. However, on the issue of gender, I was able to reconcile as I challenged Pastor Stewart to apologize for his misdiagnosis of my woundedness, and the owning of his shortcoming in the area of gender discrimination. The unfortunate aspect of this experience is that even though Pastor Stewart accused me of being wounded, he did not create space for my wound to be addressed or healed. Had his diagnosis been correct, I would have been left to heal on my own or continue living with the affliction without his support. The victim having to carry the load alone is exactly what Park critiques about Christian theology. On another note, if Pastor Stewart was given the opportunity to heal from his wound of being left by his wife to raise four children, he probably would have been more sensitive to the different spiritual needs of the victim from the victimizer as Park asserts.

¹³ Barbara A. Holmes, an ethicist of African American descent, is one who speaks to the phenomenon of contemplative practices in the time of crisis as a historical reality of the Black Church, and the need to recover in the present to heal and be empowered to address the decades of denigration and humiliation. See *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 2004).

of the cycle of sin and violence as the wounded become agents of oppression instead of possessing the healing and power to dismantle the oppressive system and cycle. Hence, there is a need for African American Christian moral agents to not only understand God's power to deliver, but also the ways in which healing and empowerment occur as the result of God's deliverance.

A third reason for possibly why issues of race and racism did not appear in the local Black church is because Pastor Stewart did not put much emphasis on these particular social constructions. He was more explicit about inquiring about gender issues than he was race matters. I wonder what would have happened if he would have asked the participants in the Bible study to share about their experiences as being African American in both the church and society. What new insight would have come forth as the result of this question? Even when I led the Bible study, I was intentional about using the experience and story of Harriet Tubman to help participants engage issues of theology, culture, race/ethnicity, and justice, but to no avail. No one openly made the connection between the injustice of slavery based on skin color and Tubman's response to contemporary injustices based on skin color and their Tubman-like response today. Those who spoke were more connected to the idea of going back to help deliver those from where one once lived with no reference to race issues and injustices. This suggests that if religious leaders are not as explicit about naming and discussing the impact of race and racism, the congregants will not be either.

Fourth, although it is commonplace for academicians to discuss issues of race and racism, this is not necessarily the case for the masses to engage racism with the same fervor and consistency as do academicians. What this suggests is that I would need to

use a different research methodology or multi-methods approach if I wanted to continue to work with narrative inquiry in order to be more intentional about raising issues of race and racism in Black church settings. With the multi-methods approach, I could elicit oral histories from participants around issues of race and racism as is done in *Souls Looking Back*.¹⁴ Using oral histories would allow me the opportunity to tap into how contemporary African American Christians have made and are making meaning of their Blackness. Information from this research method could be used in the design and implementation of the pedagogy to insure the ongoing integration of race and faith development. In addition, structured or semi-structured interviews on the topic could also yield valuable information as is done in the moral research by Janie Victoria Ward.¹⁵

A fifth reason, which is related to the third reason, why issues of race and racism probably did not emerge in the local Black church was because people do not want to talk about race. Concurring with this analysis, James Comer, child psychiatrist, and school and community consultant, argues “At the outset of a new millennium, race promises to be the most challenging issue facing the United States. Yet many Americans don’t want to talk about the topic.”¹⁶ Comer cites several reasons for the silence on issues of race and racism including the desire of both Blacks and Whites born after the Post Civil Rights era who are ignorant of the problem and want to move on to a brighter future while forgetting the damage and wounds of the past.¹⁷

¹⁴ Andrew Garrod, Janie Victoria Ward, Tracy L. Robinson, and Robert Kilkenny, eds., *Souls Looking Back: Life Stories of Growing Up Black* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁵ Janie Victoria Ward, “‘Eyes in the Back of Your Head’: Moral Themes in African American Narratives of Racial Conflict,” *Journal of Moral Education* 20, no. 3 (1991): 267-72.

¹⁶ James P. Comer, “Foreword,” in *Souls Looking Back: Life Stories of Growing Up Black*, ed. Andrew Garrod, Janie Victoria Ward, Tracy L. Robinson, and Robert Kilkenny (New York: Routledge, 1999), ix.

¹⁷ Comer, *ibid.*

Understanding people's inhibitions when discussing difficult topics such as race is important for the religious pedagogue. The more information the Christian educator has about her learners, the more equipped she is to create teaching and learning experiences that could help students move towards naming the harsh reality and the hope to be healed and reconciled as a self, neighbor, and nation.

The lack of evidence concerning the discussion of race in this particular local Black church should instill caution within theological academicians in general, and African American theologians in particular who begin their research with a social, academic construct without testing the relevance of their logically consistent analysis in and with the community they say they are reflecting. Cone's assertion that God is Black who is on the side of the oppressed African American to liberate her from her White oppressor demonstrates his brilliance in integrating Christian theology and Black Power discourse. However, on the other hand, his assertion also demonstrates his limited applicability to the religious experience of participants in Holy Light. God was a deliverer and not a liberator, and although God empowered and delivered participants, the experiences were never described in the context of being delivered from the White oppressor. The language used by participants was more akin to the Black Christian tradition of knowing that they were children of God. This suggests that participants found strength and courage in knowing that they belonged to God, and were able to resist any and all attacks that questioned their identity as a daughter or son of God.

Similar to Black liberation theology, Womanist methodology of race, class, gender, and sex supposedly speaks to and of the oppression of both African American females and males, but most work done by Womanist theologians include African

American women's religious experience of the past. Although their historical resurrection of African American women's religious experiences is important for the academy and scholarship, the question must be raised: To what degree are Womanist theologians imposing their categories and framework on the African American female exemplars that they invoke from the past?¹⁸ Furthermore, Womanist theologians are not in conversation with unemployed and underemployed African American females to capture how, or if, these women are making meaning of being Black, female, and economically poor.¹⁹ Hence, Womanist scholarship recovers the past without truly understanding how African American women's religious experiences of the past inform or has changed in African American women's religious experiences in the present. The multiple jeopardy and multiple consciousness that Womanist and Black feminist theorize about were not identified in the experiences of female participants in Holy Light even though they were able to name ways that they experienced obstacles to empowerment at the hands of other men and women in Christianity in general, and in their local church.

Although Holy Light was not influenced by or in dialogue with Black and Womanist liberation theologians, there are Black pastors and churches that are. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, is a pastor of a

¹⁸ Douglas M. Strong in *They Walked in the Spirit: Personal Faith and Social Action in America* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 24 argues that certain interpretations of African American women's religious experience in the 19th century are misleading because an emphasis is placed on self empowerment and self actualization when many of these women attributed their empowerment to God, an external agent. Strong's analysis and corrective are consistent with what I found in this study. Many of the female participants who discussed their notion of empowerment understood it to be related to God and not themselves.

¹⁹ As noted earlier, there are a few exceptions to this rule. N. Lynne Westfield's *Dear Sisters* is one such example.

church who claims to be “Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian.”²⁰

However, even though the leadership and members of Trinity are proud of their Black skin, issues of gender and theology are not easily embraced. Wright notes, “I never forget the first time the Rev. Dr. Jacquelyn Grant preached at our church. I introduced Jackie, and she stood up and said, ‘Shall we bow our heads in prayer? *Mother God . . .*’ All the eyes in the sanctuary opened.”²¹ This incident suggests that although Grant as a Womanist scholar views God as female, the congregants in Trinity could not continue in prayer with her because a female God is foreign to many African American Christians.²²

For African American Christian educators in the academy and the church who begin the educational process with a critical race theory or theology without it being grounded in practice as did Stokes and Shockley, they stand the risk of articulating a religious education vision that does not really empower African American Christians. Although the language and discourse may offer a sound critique of traditional models of Christian education that exclude the existential reality of African Americans, field tests are necessary to enhance praxis or the integration of theory and practice. N. Lynne Westfield’s work in the academy demonstrated the impact her critical pedagogy had on a White female student, but we are clueless on how African American students are being empowered to teach and/or pastor in their faith communities and the academy as the

²⁰ Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., “Doing Black Theology in the Black Church,” in *Living Stones in the Household of God: The Legacy and Future of Black Theology*, ed. Linda E. Thomas (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 18.

²¹ Ibid. (*italics mine*).

²² In my experience at Holy Light, I am very intentional about not using masculine language when I talk about God even though at times I do use masculine language. While I do embrace the feminine and masculine imagery of God as expressed in the Protestant biblical canon, I am also aware of the dominance of patriarchal language that African American evangelicals use in reference to God. In order to provide an additional image of God as parent, space must be created for congregants to explore how, or if, God has been experienced as a mother. I have been waiting for someone to question me about my limited use of masculine language so I could explain to them my rationale, but it has not happened yet.

result of her pedagogy. I trust that it is happening, but the experiences and stories of African American theology students and practitioners need to be documented so that we can know just how African Americans are being empowered. Unfortunately, at this time, Westfield stands alone as the only Christian educator who is cognizant of her developed critical pedagogy in the theological academy. However, the curricular contributions of African American Christian educator Anne Streaty Wimberly, and Black British Christian educator Anthony Reddie are paradigms that can be used to understand the relationship of Black academic theology and empowerment in African American faith communities because both Wimberly and Reddie are influenced by Black academic theology and have practiced in and created materials for Black churches.²³

From this study, some could argue that race is no longer a factor in the minds of the American people, especially certain African American Christians. Furthermore, Du Bois could be dismissed as an antiquated sociologist who is no longer relevant for today because the problem of the color line has been resolved. However, I think it is too early to dismiss the relevance of Du Bois for the two abovementioned reasons and because he has helped me to appreciate and affirm the diverse experience of and response to racism by African Americans. Although I do not think his intent was to celebrate the diversity among African American moral agents because his norm, the African American integrationalist, trumped the African American hypocrite and the African American radical. Nevertheless, the negative perception of one African American moral response towards another one needs to be addressed and corrected if African Americans are serious about racial justice and healing.

²³ Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); Anthony Reddie, *Growing into Hope*, 2 vols. (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1998).

In this degradation of one African American to another, the African American hypocrite is perceived by the African American radical as an “Uncle Tom” or “sell-out.” The African American radical is perceived by the African American integrationalist to be a militant who breaks stride with the love-ethic in Christian theology. Then, the African American integrationalist is perceived by the African American radical as a passive, weak individual in the face of a violent, racist America. To top it all off, the African American hypocrite fears the African American radical will stir up unwanted problems for the African American hypocrite, and yet, the African American hypocrite desires the benefits from the efforts of both the radical and the integrationalist but does not take the risk in order to procure them. Whatever the African American hypocrite receives, it is done by playing by all the rules that this moral agent did not help to create, or sometimes it is at the expense of the African American radical or integrationalist.²⁴

I am not sure, yet, how to address and affirm such diversity and tension in my pedagogy towards justice and healing. What I do know is that each African American moral agent has found a creative way to survive in a world that would suggest otherwise. Somehow, someday, more and more African Americans must begin to realize how at certain times in one’s life, the moral response that was once disdained became the one of choice even though it may have been just for a season. In this new space of sensitivity, the task of the moral agent becomes one of how to understand and engage the tension between the individual and community because one understands herself in relation to the whole.

²⁴ Although I do affirm and appreciate each African American moral agent, I do find certain tactics problematic such as the African American hypocrite’s sacrifice of the African American radical or integrationalist in order to get ahead.

The leaders in Holy Light sort of embodied this tension as they addressed the confusion they were experiencing under Pastor Stewart's inconsistent leadership. Their focus was not to critique his pastoral leadership in a way that would discourage him. Moreover, they were not looking to merely exert power and prestige in the life of the church. Rather, they approached the situation with a desire to redress the problem for all parties involved including the health and development of the church. In that moment, several leaders in a local Black church were able to respond to a situation in a way that reflected their love and care for self, each other, and the greater good.

Empowerment and Leadership in the Black Church

As noted in Chapter 2, African American pastors have had to play multiple roles and be numerous things to so many people both inside and outside of the church. Moreover, the ways in which African American pastors have learned to shepherd and nurture their flocks grew mostly out of the crucible of their actual leadership and very little from their seminary or academic training. In the very act of ministering, they have learned to respond to the crisis of the day in an attempt to provide shelter and courage for a people who have been historically denied access to the "American Dream."

As I reflect on the journey of the African American pastorate who chooses to lead by engaging social and spiritual evil, I wonder what toll has it (the journey) taken on the person who cares for so many others? How has the African American pastor been able to tend to her/his personal needs and issues while simultaneously trying to lead the church and a community? What kind of ongoing support does the pastor need in order to remain or become accountable and effective?

These questions can be addressed, to some degree, in the experience and story of Pastor Anthony Stewart. As the pastor of Holy Light, Pastor Stewart had a goal of empowering the leaders and other congregants. He believed in hearing the voice of others as he made critical decisions in the life of the church. However, he struggled with embodying the leadership model of empowerment and collaboration, and he found himself going in circles until one critical moment in the life of his ministry. When he decided that he could not be a pastor to his ex-wife and asked her to find another church where she would be able to grow in the faith, he had confronted a stronghold or demon that thwarted his efforts as clergy for years. In the moment that he was able to confront his ex-wife and his past, he was able to see his limitations not necessarily as limits, but as wounds that needed to be tended to in order for him to be effective. As he confessed to Holy Light what he had done, he proudly admitted that he would not have anymore problems confronting others in the church because he had become liberated from his past. In addition, he admitted the reason he would pacify members who came to him because of what a ministry leader had done to correct inappropriate behavior. He stated, plainly, that he did not want the members to leave the church.

Yes, this was a monumental moment in the life of Pastor Stewart, and potentially Holy Light. Subsequently, as consultant, I encouraged Pastor Stewart to take a sabbatical so that he could heal properly and discover what the Lord was saying and doing in order to move ahead. I also provided suggestions on how he could maximize his time off. Although he agreed that it was needed, he was afraid to leave the church for an extended period of time anytime soon because both attendance and tithes dropped when he was not present at church. In considering the reality of the situation, I did not give up on the

soundness of the recommendation and stated that we could plan for his sabbatical, and encouraged him to trust God that the church's doors would still be open when he returned. Again, he agreed, and was excited about the possibility because he knew that the model of self-care was necessary for other churches and pastors who look up to his leadership. But, the sabbatical never came, partly because he did not hold up to his end of the deal in the development of a plan. Then, another part had to do with he became overwhelmed by the needs of the church and the lack of a church infrastructure in order to respond. He was forced to take a Friday and Saturday off by the chair of the board of trustees. Of course, Pastor Stewart was still struggling with boundaries, and unfortunately, he was not able to make a decision on his own that he needed to step away.

With his new growing ability to confront people and situations, and establish boundaries, Pastor Stewart was on the road of empowerment by dealing with his pain and fear of the past. Yet, how many pastors have personal issues that are never treated that thwart their good intentions as leaders? At what price is it to the pastor's clergy and lay leaders who are undermined in their authority, and become confused of the expectations of the pastor? Then, what about the members who find they can circumvent their immediate leader's authority by going to the pastor? How can a pastor and church begin to heal from unhealthy practices and an unhealthy environment?

These necessary, probing questions are not meant to be answered in isolation from the process. However, what is important to note is that pastors need an accountability group and they need to find ways to be replenished. This entails pastors finding people with whom they can be vulnerable with and trust. In addition, it requires space to listen to and know oneself so that she/he can communicate what is going on in

ways that does not create a split between the pastor and the church, or me versus them mentality, but a space where the pastor will be able to rightfully own his/her responsibility. Finally, pastors need to model this for their local churches so that leaders and members will have the opportunity to work through personal and interpersonal conflict in the church.²⁵

Reconstructing the Black Church

Since the late 1700's, the Black Church emerged as an entity that reflected the aspirations of African American clergy and laity to live a life in the antebellum and later postbellum U.S. that was consistent with their Christian convictions of the parenthood of God and kinship of humanity. During this long, arduous journey towards embodying and experiencing their Christian theology, African American evangelicals have engaged the tension between the spiritual and social worlds in their quest for social, political, economic, and educational uplift and enfranchisement. These material aims by a religious institution confused social scholars like E. Franklin Frazier because he thought the Black Church had become too focused on the social at the expense of the spiritual. Then, on the other hand, scholars like James Cone and Manning Marable critiqued the Black Church for becoming too otherworldly and ambiguous, respectively. However, in the final analysis, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya provide a framework that explains the assessment of Frazier, Cone, and Marable because each views the Black Church as being either social or spiritual instead of as an institution that has had to be two in tension.

²⁵ The discipline of congregational studies addresses these issues of pastoral leadership, but at this time, I am not aware of how this discipline includes issues of race and racism or how Black Church studies includes these psychological and spiritual formation issues in the discipline. Hence, more is needed in this area in both congregational and Black Church studies.

These various reconstructive images of the Black Church in both the past and present have dealt adequately with the social and/or spiritual relevance of the Black Church, but no one has looked closely at the relevance of the Black Church's theology and organizational structure in and throughout time.²⁶ This is important because when the Black Methodists' and Baptists' chose to worship in a less hostile and oppressive environment, they adopted or incorporated the theology and polity of their White denominational parents. Could the theology of the parenthood of God and kinship of humanity be rendered powerless by the presence of the White theology and polity? Could this be a reason why the Black Church has had its peaks and valleys of presence and power in the world without being sustained for the protracted struggle of justice and democracy?

Pastor Stewart's insight on the upper room experience during Bible study was provocative and timely. In the reexamination of a familiar text, we both saw the promise of engaging difference that had strong implications for Holy Light. Although it has not yet taken shape, if further developed, the reflection on and application of the upper room experience in Acts 1:12-17 for Holy Light could prove to be a necessary theological move that could launch us into a new area of empowerment. It could become a modern day example of Thurman's experiment of democracy within Christianity and a local Black church. It could help Holy Light deal effectively with the religious, social, economic, and educational diversity that already exists in the church, and create space in helping it become the multicultural and multiracial church that Pastor Stewart envisions.

²⁶ Paris does critique the Black Church's need for a more sound theology in *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, but this is his conclusion in light of dealing with the social impact of the Black Church and not the nature of his analysis. Even though I raise the concern and need for a diachronic theological analysis of the Black Church, I am not sure at this time how to conduct such a study. How can a historical theology of the Black Church be conducted?

As many members in Holy Light have been confirmed in their vertical relationship with the transcendent God as a child, the challenge still remains of how to experience more intimately our sibling kinship with those in the church and God's children in the community.²⁷

As Pastor Stewart continues to heal from his past and grow into a more secure place within himself as person and pastor, Holy Light will continue making strides towards empowerment and institutional change. After my departure from the field as researcher, Pastor Stewart was considering the proposal I had presented for organizational change in the life of Holy Light as well as reading literature on how Black communities have historically organized for change. It seems as if the time is ripe for both Pastor Stewart and Holy Light to establish roots for the wings to soar into a new day and season in ministry and purpose. What will happen next is the rest of the story yet to be told.

The Black Church: Past, Present, and Future

The Black Church has been at the center and margins simultaneously throughout its lifespan. As the center, it has served as a spiritual and social institution for the Black masses in a way that no other institution in the Black community can boast of. However, because of the marginality of its membership, the Black Church has also been intentionally excluded from political, economic, and educational access and advancement in America's public sphere. This is yet another paradox of Black life. The multiple

²⁷ I am aware that everyone in the surrounding community of Holy Light is not a Christian nor do they desire to be. However, my reference to them as children of God is not an attempt to impose my religious worldview on them, but a humble reminder of their humanity and connection to the divine regardless of their social and religious location. In this vein, I am countering the view within many African American evangelical churches that the church is only present to give them Jesus without being sensitive to the ways the church needs to become a partner with the people in the community.

paradoxes of Black life are possibly unconscious to most, but this study has hopefully sensitized African Americans and non-African Americans of this painful, yet at times, empowering reality.

Today, due to the numerous social agencies and organizations within communities in general and the African American community in particular, the Black Church does not have to bear the burden of empowerment and social justice alone. As each local congregation continues to understand and embody its mission, the church can begin to prioritize how it will respond faithfully to the call of justice both within and beyond its walls. Although the idea of partnering with different civic and religious groups can be frightening for some African American congregations and leaders, hopefully, they will begin to see the advantages of collaboration instead of being consumed by the differences.

By welcoming and joining others in the process of peace and justice making, African American churches and clergy become both leaders and followers. Where they are strong, they can offer insight and assistance. Where they are weak, they can look to others to be more of a beacon of light until they are ready to do likewise. Moreover, African American pastors of predominantly White churches should not think they are excluded from this study. They can help their congregants become sensitized to the systems of oppression of both the past and present, and how their congregants have a place of privilege in this country in light of these unjust systems. Hopefully, an ethic of racial justice will emerge so that more predominantly White churches can participate in the process of healing and justice. Nonetheless, regardless of one's race, ethnicity, religious or non-religious location, this study illumines the need to examine both

internalized and external forms of oppression in the world and institutions so that community would prevail instead of chaos.

Pastor Stewart has a vision for a multicultural church, and even in this context, issues of power and oppression do not disappear. Nevertheless, if his dream is realized, this suggests that his presently predominant Black church will become something different. This would be the fulfillment of his African American religious foreparents because they never wanted to leave their White denominational parents. However, it is my desire that Pastor Stewart and Holy Light would continue to engage issues of power and difference in even more explicit ways so that all members can be affirmed as children of God. If the designation “Black church” should become obsolete due to the changing demographics and embodying of shalom in Holy Light, then a once local Black church would have resurrected the prophetic voice of its past.

Conclusion

I would have never imagined that the health and empowerment of a church was so strongly connected to the spiritual, emotional, and psychological well-being of its leader. This demonstrates the power of an individual within a particular organization. Also, it is a humbling reminder of the immensity of the call to lead. Even though this study did not intentionally engage the issue of leadership in the Black Church, the topic has emerged as a dominant theme concerning empowerment and Christian education in a local Black church. I have grown tremendously in my understanding of pastoral leadership and the need to maintain or work towards health and wholeness. Unfortunately, Pastor Stewart is not an anomaly because so many pastors, regardless of race or ethnicity, have not been adequately trained to care for self as they care for others. There is a dire need for

spiritual and psychological support for those African American pastors who are challenged to live in both the spiritual and social worlds because of the reality of social injustice and oppression. As a pedagogue of empowerment, I look forward to the challenge of assisting other pastors and Black churches in their self-discovery and recovery as the church finds its place and relevance amidst God's creation.

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